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SOMALI WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY OF DIASPORA  
IN MINNEAPOLIS AND LONDON

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DPHIL IN GENDER STUDIES

SCHOOL OF LAW, POLITICS & SOCIOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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### Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

## Abstract

This dissertation is research in the area of political engagement as affected by gender and immigrant status. More specifically, the dissertation examines the political participation of Somali diaspora Muslim women in Minneapolis and London. The topic is of particular significance given the increase in essentialist arguments of inner incompatibility between Islam and Western democratic and liberal culture. No research to date has empirically analyzed the political participation of Somali diaspora women in Minneapolis and London. The goal of the study was twofold: to understand similarities and differences in diaspora women from two different sites and to explore how generational differences affect the forms and levels of political participation of the diaspora woman. To capture the similarities and differences of the respondents, I employed a qualitative approach. This method allows accounts from the perspectives of the women themselves to explain the types of participation factors that hinder or engender their involvement. The empirical analysis is built on semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 40 Somali diaspora Muslim women living in Minneapolis and London. Interview themes involved topics such as discrimination at school, downward mobility, political activism both transnational and local, belonging, and identification. Furthermore, personal observations made during political demonstrations and community gatherings were included in the analysis. The study draws broadly from the following theories: postcolonialism, transnationalism, intersectionality, and social capital. The findings from the study suggest that Somali diaspora women participate in the politics of Minneapolis and London and that generation does affect type and form of political engagement. Moreover, my findings argue that immigrant women have public roles in transnational politics. This research will contribute to the literature on immigrant women and political participation by providing further evidence to

explain how generation, locality and religious affiliations impact Somali immigrant women's political activities in Minneapolis and London.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my hooyo Xawo Jamac Kaarshe, a strong and smart woman whom I miss every day.

## Acknowledgements

The end of dissertation-writing is described as a release after which life will take a new, and better, course. I cannot agree more to that description. After many years of working on this project I am very eager to get my life back to normal.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This dissertation is research in the area of political engagement as affected by gender and immigrant status. More specifically, the dissertation examines the political and civic participation of Somali diaspora women in Minneapolis and London. This study will additionally explore to what extent generational differences affect the forms of political participation taken by diaspora women. To capture the similarities and differences of Somali diaspora members in London and Minneapolis, I employed a qualitative approach. This method utilizes personal accounts from the women themselves to explain the factors that hinder or engender their involvement. Accordingly, semi structured interviews were used to elicit women's own experiences, perspectives, and feelings with respect to their political participation.

It is important to study forms of participation and levels of engagement because they constitute a vital indicator of whether democracies are performing in relation to the needs and desires of all citizens (Lovenduski, 2005; Verba, 2001; Verba et al., 1995). Political and civic participation and engagement are also effective measures of social and political inclusion. Studies indicate that social capital correlates with political participation (Putnam, 2000). The types of social interactions that immigrants engage in and the context in which these interactions take place have an impact in their awareness of politics and their proclivity to participate (Jones-Correa, 1998).

In recent decades, both the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) have been experiencing major changes in the source countries of their immigrants (Schain, 2009). These changes occurred in part because of the revision of immigration law in the 1960s which eased the restrictions on quotas by national origin with which immigrants are admitted (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2012) and consequently changed the various immigration policies that were developed



in the 1990s and 2000s (Vertovec, 2007). There are also exogenous events, such as civil wars, famine and globalization that contribute to the influx. Although different ages, the women included in this study all came to Minneapolis or London as refugees in the 1990s and therefore are part of the forced modern global migration.

Somali migration has been described as “crisis-driven” (Crush & Tavera, 2010, p. 1) because it is a consequence of a protracted civil war that destroyed the country’s physical, social and institutional infrastructure. The lack of a viable political system and adequate humanitarian resources has forced millions of Somalis to leave their homeland. According to a 2012 report by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the estimated percentage of Somalis who live outside the country is nearly 14%, with large concentrations in Europe, North America, and the Middle East (UNDP, 2011).

The modern global migration contributed to the increase of the foreign born ethnic minority female population in the United States and Britain (Census, 2011; Strum & Tarantolo, 2001) as now there are more female immigrants from Africa, East and South Asia, Central and Latin America. These women, like some of the respondents of my study, bring with them the special features of their cultures of origin, gender regimes, languages, ideas of membership, political values, religion, and unique perspectives.

The two sites of my research, Minneapolis and London, are places that many members of the Somali diaspora call home. The political landscapes of these cities are becoming more diverse as prompted by rapid demographic changes and the social impact that migrants have on the general public. The Somali diaspora is richly contributing to these changes but they are also dealing with the challenges of being Muslim and immigrants (Abdi, 2012).

Like other visible immigrants in the US and Britain whose status is visible because of their dress or features, Somalis experience discrimination and are wrongly characterized. Because of their culture, religion, and race, they often receive negative reactions from the public. The media has referred to them as an “invisible community and absent from local and national network,” (Haji-Abdi, 2013, p. 5) has labelled them a transnational community who challenges traditional ideas of nation-state belonging (Waters, 2013) and as uneducated, lazy people who depend on the welfare system and state-subsidized housing (Abdi, 2012). These statements have contributed to increased exclusion by the mainstream. The related question is then how individuals who are subjects of stereotyping and viewed as “others” interpret their own belonging in relation to external images and in what ways their exclusion and sense of belonging affect their political participation. Recognizing this context, my research aim is to investigate Somali diaspora women’s reflection on their sociopolitical circumstances in Minneapolis or London.

The analysis of the political attitude and political behavior of Somali diaspora women in London or Minneapolis demonstrates that not only do these women participate in politics but that they use political participation as a mechanism to counter discrimination and stigmatization. This validates that politics and policies are important elements in creating inclusive societies and that immigrants’ political participation is their tool for expressing concerns and raising awareness of changes needed at the societal level (O’Neill, Gidengil, & Young, 2012).

A definition of political participation is in order before proceeding. According to Rosenstone and Hansen (2003), political participation is defined as “action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values” (p. 4). This definition is broader than others which define political participation in terms of conventional activities using the

channels of representative government and engagement, such as supporting preferred candidates, donating money, volunteering and voting, as well as other activities available in the electoral system (Norris, 2002; Welzel & Deutsch, 2012). Missing from this definition is unconventional participation which includes activities employed as a means of political redress, such as petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, unofficial strikes, sit-ins, blocking of traffic, property damage or physical occupation (Marsh & Kaase, 1979b, p. 59). Furthermore, these studies on political participation are limited to actions that take place within the nation-state.

For the purposes of this study, my definition of political participation encompasses the full range of behaviors, values, and activities taken by citizens either individually or collectively with the intention to influence the content of the government's policies and decision-making process. My typology of political participation comprises a wide array of actions such as voting, donating money, grassroots campaigning, signing petitions, contacting politicians, public protest, and includes the demonstration of cynicism by not voting or blank voting.

It also covers actions that would not have been included in handbooks on participation. For example, because my respondents are naturalized citizens but still victims of prejudice and discrimination, I consider the push by immigrants to naturalize as political participation because it presents a means to denounce the social exclusion brought on by the increase in xenophobia. This prepares immigrants individually and collectively for future political leverage. Another observation of significant political participation was in the individual's transnational positioning and their utilizing the benefits gained by the geopolitical influence of their new status as citizen. The rights that come with citizenship serve as effective tools with which to become directly involved in sociopolitical change through mobilization efforts, advocacy, and promotion of gender equality as well as the resistance to the neocolonial antiterrorist campaign. In the same

way citizens' advocacy for the advancement of their ethnic religious identity by supporting the building of religious institutions, community centers, and shopping malls can be viewed as political activity. My definition of political participation complements my respondents' views on politics and the wide range of their reported political participation.

The respondents stated that they were engaged in various forms of both conventional (voting, membership in political party) and unconventional (protests, petition circulation) political participation in order to enhance their own and their loved ones' wellbeing. In fact, there have been several protests in Minneapolis and London against closing the US and UK remittance systems (Shah, 2012; Osman, 2013) which support families back in Somalia. Women also protested the arrests of young Somali men who were allegedly attempting to join terrorist groups (Kerr, 2015). Some of the interviewed participated in these demonstrations seeking to protect their families both here and back home.

### **Locating the Somali Diaspora Women's Political Agency and Activism**

In April 2015, hundreds of Somalis, mostly women, gathered in Saint Paul, Minnesota at the State Capitol to protest the arrest of six young men accused of attempting to travel to Syria to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The women wore t-shirts adorned with the arrested youths' pictures. They held signs reading "Free our Brothers and Sons" and chanted "We have rights!" Among the protesters were the mothers of the six young men, whose ages ranged from 19 to 21. These mothers declared that their sons' intentions were not to join ISIS, nor were they capable of committing or conspiring to commit acts of terrorism.

In February 2012, during the Somali conference in London, many women protested and held signs saying "hands off Somalia", charging Britain with planning to dissect an already divided Somalia. These demonstrations and others that took place in both Minneapolis and

London were portrayed by the media as the Somali community expressing perceived injustices, and thus the issues were not given the merit they deserved. The presence of diaspora women in these protests and the dimension of political citizenship they displayed escaped the attention of social scientists studying the politics of immigrant women. They missed the connection of the engagement in transnational political practices as a reaction to postcolonial oppression and did not understand the impact of history on the diaspora women's political involvement.

My study seeks to remedy this shortcoming. I examine activities reported by the respondents, while still operating within the traditional roles of Somali women, including public protests as they sought to make their voices heard,. These political actions projected a gendered identity that draws upon the traditional role of the "moral woman/mother," one who protects against harm and injustices, and as the women experiment with gendered representation, this image is articulated by using strong agentic elements.

My research separated the respondents by age cohorts and revealed that the relationship to sense of belonging in American or British society is different for the first generation and the younger generation respondents. First generation respondents strongly believe they will return to the homeland, and thus Somalia politics both in the homeland and at international levels continues to be significant in their lives. This transnational attitude reflects the political participation of the first generation respondents.

To the contrary, although the younger generation respondents are aware of their Somali heritage, they also identify with the American and British cultures and see themselves as Minneapolitans or Londoners. Yet, regardless of their sense of belonging to local community, they are viewed as outsiders. This othering is being confronted by the younger generation, and their political participation is intended to bring deep change to their current society.

The dissertation explores the challenges in different sites where young respondents experienced ethnic discrimination and stigmatization. Discussion of cases where mainstream American or British people question the belonging of young Somalis to these two societies are presented. It is shown that the experiences with the education system and mass media affected respondents and ignited their political consciousness. I will highlight that young respondents engage with others through a variety of associations, forming many different types of networks. That each of these networks have different sets of norms, trust, and reciprocity and that both ethnic and nonethnic social networks are not only important in terms of emotional support but also crucial in providing the young respondents opportunities, choice, and power. The study demonstrates that the younger generation respondents are less likely than first generation women to take part in transnational politics. Their focus is to be part of a progressive movement that changes the condition of oppressed minorities in the society where they are living and confront the racist postcolonial discourse that elevates Whiteness (hooks, 1991).

The motto “personal is political” fits well with the experiences of my respondents. The phrase was used during the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s as a political statement to indicate that things that happen in women’s private spheres (i.e., the work place, home, or school), manifests the power dynamics of public spheres (Hobbs & Rice, 2013). In this dissertation, I demonstrate how school, housing, employment, and transnational family issues have heavily influenced the respondents’ political participation. Although respondents did not necessarily always recognize their activism as feminism, they admitted that their political experiences were shaped by their gender, but also by their race, religion, and ethnicity. In doing so, they agree with Black feminist thought which explains intersectionality and the ways minority women are affected by interlocking oppressions (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1991).

Moreover, scholars of migration studies have treated gender as a central organizing principle in migration and illustrated the role that intersection of class, gender, and race plays in immigrant women's adjustment in the new country.

### **Placing Gender in Migration Studies**

With the migration of women from developing countries, the classical women-focused research has moved more toward the examination of gender (Piper, 2005) and away from the white working-class women model that dominated the activism and literature of European immigrant women (Green, 2012). As a contrast to this approach, the 1990s research that focused on gender and migration analyzed the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, and culture, and the reconstruction of gender roles in the context of the new migration experience. The research in this field draws attention to ways in which immigrant gender relations change through the process of migration.

These studies have examined employment conditions, demonstrating that female immigrants have upward occupational mobility, revealed the existence of transnational motherhood where women have minor children still living in their former countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Livingston, 2006), detailed the influences of women's employment on the household economy (Hugo, 1993; Pedraza, 1991), exposed the use of hybrid identities and the opportunity beyond traditional gender roles (Brah, 1996), demonstrated women as markers and the repository of an authentic cultural identity (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992), provided examination of the impact of class as well as gender (Anthias, 1992), and studied the transplanting of gendered translocal cultural practices (Werbner, 1997).

Because of the efforts of these scholars, we have gathered a considerable body of empirical knowledge about how gender dynamics organize the social relations and structures that

shape the new global migration. Many of the studies on immigrant and ethnic minority women focus on Latina and South Asian women. Effort is still needed to account for other communities' experiences. The African migrant women's experience has not been studied in the same depth as the Latina and Asian experiences. Moreover, there is a need to expand the diverse contexts of gender and migration.

For this reason, there are emerging studies seeking to go beyond the analysis of gender relations at the family and household level to broader social matters; such as formation of identity, sense of belonging, impact on state policies, media portrayal, and the reaction by public institutions. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003):

In this current phase, research is beginning to look at the extent to which gender permeates a variety of practices, identities and institutions implicated in immigration. Here, patterns of labor incorporation, globalization, religious practice and values, ethnic enclave businesses, citizenship, sexuality and ethnic identity are interrogated in ways that reveal how gender is incorporated into a myriad of daily operations and institutional political and economic structures (p. 10).

Among these emerging immigrant studies are those that explore the gendered processes of political engagement among migrants as a group. They consider explicitly the way gender ideologies intersect with political and civic engagement. But the majority of research focuses on the experiences of Arab, Asian, and Latin American migrants in the United States (Hardy-Fanta, 1993, 2013; Jones-Correa, 1998; Read, 2007), and in the United Kingdom focus is on Latin American, South Asian, and Caribbean immigrants (Fisher, 2002, 2012; McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2011; Takhar, 2007, 2012).

While these studies are sensitive to culture, ethnic issues and gendered patterns of participation; as a theoretical approach they tend to focus either on group level institutional resources (macro-level), individual level resources (micro-level) or contextual resources (meso-level). Moreover, their studies are focused on political participation that takes place at the



nation-state level, and they don't examine transnationalism practices and how these networks intersect with local politics. The research does not place enough emphasis on the enduring influence of religio-cultural dimensions on the political interest of particular groups. These studies do not conduct cross-country comparisons, note intergenerational differences and are silent as to how intersectionality affects Muslim African immigrant modes of political participation. No research to date has empirically analyzed the political participation of Somali women as Muslim, African and immigrant subjects.

This gap in the research is serious because the migration from Somalia to Minneapolis and London represents a growing segment of the population in these two cities (US Census Bureau, 2010; Office for National Statistics, 2013 – ONS). According to Abdi (2015), the Somali population in Minnesota is around 40,000-50,000. Open Society Foundations (2014) report “that there are 99,484 people of Somali origin currently residing in the United Kingdom, which is an increase on the 43,519 people recorded in the 2001” (p. 24). The probability is that these numbers will increase as the Somali migration to the West is still ongoing, and this trajectory is favored by many Somali (Abdi, 2015).

As a result of such fast growth, scholars misunderstand the values and perspectives that characterize this group's political attitudes, let alone whether Somali women participate in politics, their forms of participation, and what factors influence or hinder their participation. These are the questions surrounding gender and politics that my thesis attempts to answer.

My research makes five major contributions to the literature on diaspora/immigration gendered political engagement. First, it expands the scope of the literature on gender and political participation, as I suggest that immigrant women do participate in transnational politics. Second, I propose that gendered religio-cultural framing plays an important role in the political

engagement of my participants. Third, my research highlights intergenerational differences in participation and the importance of nonethnic networks for social capital. Fourth, I shine a comparative lens on the structural incorporation of Black Muslim diaspora/immigrant women into the political processes of the United States and Britain. Finally, by making a multisited and multigenerational comparison, my study attempts to go beyond the culturally uniform group and the extensive reliance of immigrants on “ethnic community” that has frequently been observed by researchers. My study uncovers other factors such as religion, belonging, and political affiliation that can help determine identity, and speaks to the respondents’ adherence or allegiance to any specific or grouping of identities. In particular, my study details the respondents’ own characteristics and networks that shape their political participation. It also exposes important differences regarding the United States/Minneapolis and the United Kingdom/London.

In sum, my argument in this dissertation is that if we are to understand the processes and pathways of political participation among Somali diaspora women, it is essential, but insufficient, to study traditional formal and informal participation. It is essential, but insufficient, to apply, without revision, models of immigrant and minority women’s political involvement mainly designed to examine the attitudes of non-Muslim women. Understanding Somali diaspora women’s political attitudes requires an analysis of their transnational life, their national life and the circumstances of their daily life, because it is from a combination of all these circumstances that Somali women construct meaningful political worldviews.

### **Comparing Diasporas**

Comparative studies have always played a crucial role in the explanation of migration research. As the discussion in the above section suggests, I undertook a comparative research

approach for my dissertation. In this study, I compare the political experiences of the women of two Somali diaspora communities and two different generations. In so doing, I build on a burgeoning body of literature that compares separate communities of the same migrant group who have settled in different parts of the world, in places with different immigration histories and political/social contexts. This type of comparison is the divergent comparison model, one of the three comparative methods recommended by Nancy Green. The other two are: the linear model, which is the study of one migrant group before and after migration; and the convergent model, which examines different migrant groups in one place (Green, 1999).

The advantage of the divergent comparison model is that it challenges the uniformity of the Somali diaspora throughout spaces. It allows us to explore the interaction between the context of immigrant reception in each society and my respondents' own characteristics that shape their incorporation and adjustments.

Rima Berns McGown's work on the Somali communities of London and Toronto, Gail Hopkins' research on the Somali diaspora women of London and Toronto and Cawo Abdi's account of three countries, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa and the United States, are examples of studies that take this approach. All three authors provide beneficial illustration of how identity, gender, religion and transnational linkages, as well as the acceptance or refusal of the host society, influence their participants' construction of identities and their plans for long-term settlement. They highlight that the Somali diaspora's success in certain locations is not necessarily replicated in other places and contexts.

Additionally, Minneapolis and London are two different metropolises and the life experiences of Somali Minneapolitans are different from those of their counterpart Somali Londoners. People often regard themselves as having an identification and bonding dependent

upon the various surroundings in which they find themselves within their community. This particularly applies to the younger generation in Minneapolis or London who are forming their identities from the range of possibilities based upon belonging, political affiliation, education, religion, gender, race, class, and ethnicity either assigned or chosen as a marker on an individual basis. Somaliness, therefore, only acts as one base for the development of identity in Minneapolis and London.

This selecting of identity according to circumstance can lead to different types of behaviors, including the choice of belonging, bonding and/or bridging when considering political participation. That is why in the past several decades, researchers like Brubaker have contested the concept of “‘groupism’ the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed,” a practice which is systemic within migration literature (Brubaker, 2002 p. 164). Instead they recognize the fact that migrants and their descendants have personal networks and connections which transcend the nation-state and ethnic group. Understanding this reality demands new conceptual tools that go beyond methodological nationalism.

Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) challenged “methodological nationalism,” which they explain as “the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (p: 301). They identified three different versions of methodological nationalism that are found in different fields of enquiry and that mutually reinforce each other: a) ignoring the primary importance of nationalism for modern societies; b) naturalization of “normal” (i.e., the assumption that the boundaries of the nation-state establishes and defines the unit of analysis), and c) territorial limitation which confines the study of social processes to the

political and territorial boundaries of a particular nation-state (Wimmer & Schiller 2002, p. 308). The second version dominates the empirical research on migration.

Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) duly complained about migration scholars who normalize the ‘nation-state’ as “the container model of society that encompasses a culture, a polity, an economy, and a bounded social group” (p. 579). To theorize migration within this approach is insufficient, as this model does not capture salient agents and causes such as transnational linkages, structures, or identities. It is important to note that critics of methodological nationalism do not deny the importance of the nation-state. Instead, they suggest that “if migration scholars set aside their methodological nationalism; transnational migration studies can contribute to social theories that elucidate the mutual constitution of the global, national and local” (Glick Schiller, 2009, p. 4).

Indeed, the application “of ethnic groups as units of analysis is a logical but unacceptable consequence of the methodological nationalism of mainstream social science” (Glick Schiller 2008, p. 3). Glick Schiller stated that methodological ethnicity impedes the consideration of the role of locality in migration incorporation locally and transnationally because the concept of ethnic groups is deployed within the borders of a nation-state. Again, the easy reference to the ethnic groups as units of analysis is problematic because it discounts non-ethnic forms of social networks that can provide valuable information about the researched subjects. Yet despite these drawbacks, migration scholars continue setting their research by describing their analysis in ethnic terms. “At best, careful researchers who begin with an ethnic lens conclude that the migrants in their study chose non-ethnic forms of incorporation” (Glick Schiller, 2008, p. 6).

I do share Glick-Schiller’s assessment that the framing of migration research in terms of ethnic groups within nation states obscures the effects of locality and nonethnic connections and

the effect these can have in the adjustment to the lack of and the building up of social capital. I locate my respondents within the transnational social fields in which they may or may not be embedded (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). I do give attention to the complexity of transmigrant (Glick-Schiller, 2008) political attitude and the mixing of cultures and selective local norms. Having said that, I must admit that I am an unintended sinner as I begin my research by outlining my analysis in ethnic terms and I recruited the participants through the traditional ethnic routes. Despite this, my study noted that the younger generation respondents engage non-ethnic connections for social capital that is translated into political capital.

### **Aims of the Study and Research Questions**

The objective of this research is to make a contribution that helps fill the existing void in the field of Muslim Black diaspora women studies regarding political participation within the multigenerational Somali female population of Minneapolis and London, by providing analysis and insight based on the literature review and empirical research of the specific migrant group. Therefore, my aim is to comprehensively carry out research and explore diasporic women's orientation toward society and politics within the United States and the United Kingdom.

Women's political participation is considered important for gender equality in both countries and, as such, has been studied by feminists (Staeheli, Kofman, & Peake, 2004). It is important to ask questions about diasporic women's perceptions of established political modes in these countries and their position in relation to them as citizens, as well as to examine their motivations for involvement. Such questions are necessary with respect to issues faced by diasporic women, including the triple bind biases related to their race, religion, and gender.

Clearly, there are big differences between diasporas and migrants, at least in terms of self-perception and how their experiences shape their engagement with both the country of origin and

destination. While I am aware of these differences, in the upcoming chapters when addressing my respondents there will be instances where I use the term immigrants instead of diaspora. I do so to show the commonality between all incomers, particularly in reference to sense of belonging and struggles for inclusion, as well as to connect with the literature of immigrant women and politics because diaspora studies have not included detailed discussions of gender and politics. Nevertheless, my research is about Somali diaspora women. A concept of diaspora and how the Somali communities living abroad fit in the diaspora concept will be discussed in Chapter 2.

This research presents a case study of the political participation of women in Somali diaspora communities in Minneapolis and London, asking four main questions:

1. Do Somali diaspora women participate in politics in their new countries: the United States and United Kingdom? If yes: what and who influences their political participation?
2. Do Somali diaspora women participate in transnational politics?
3. What are the differences and similarities between levels and types of political participation between Somali women in the United States and the United Kingdom?
4. What are the social resources and networks that influence the political participation of Somali diaspora women?

These questions, in turn, solicit other general analytical questions about the women's political experiences and involvements in these contexts, such as the following:

- Given the Somali diaspora's particular sending contexts and receiving contexts, how and to what extent have members of the Somali diaspora and their offspring been accepted into their new societies?

- What intellectual influences shape the women's political participation: Western feminism, African womanism, postcolonial theories and/or Islamic feminism?
- How do broader social shifts (changing family forms and orientations to religion) affect the women's motivations and political engagement?

I address these questions using the narratives of the participants and my observation. I interviewed 20 women from Minneapolis and 20 women from London for a total sample of 40 respondents. In the last four years, I have been following on social media the political exchanges between members of the diaspora communities with those from the Somali homeland, as well as with the co-ethnic and co-clan diaspora. These latter are the citizens of other African countries who have Somali ethnic heritage. I have also participated in civic and political gatherings and protests organized by Somalis in Minneapolis and London.

I propose that the concept of diaspora provides a framework for understanding the contradictory aspects of the Somali immigrant experience, as some immigrants construct a hybrid cultural identity while others hold strongly to their traditional cultural identity. Examining Somali immigrant communities as a diaspora helps in understanding immigrant networks and the ways they establish solidarities that embrace their homeland, their host societies, and the larger diaspora community scattered around the world. As an analytical framework, diaspora conflates assorted loyalties and links that are integral to the processes of global migration. Hence, the framework of diaspora contributes to the understanding of the convoluted dynamics of whole population movements.

I examine the political agency of the respondents and the relevance of Islamic feminism as an analytical tool. My intent is to demonstrate that the women of this study have agency. That is, they have the capacity to make effective choices for themselves, their family, and their



community and are able to transform those choices into desired results. This agency is shaped by Islamic feminism, with the added nuances of Somali womanhood, as it challenges Western feminism's notion of autonomy and motivation. Western feminism is organized around gender justice, whereas Islamic feminism tends to adopt a more complex, hyphenated approach that embodies the goals of religious freedom, social equity, and women's rights. Certainly, Western indicators of women's rights do not include mothers protesting against the arrest of their sons and stigmatization of their community. For that, the political participation of Somali women cannot be understood in reference to liberal feminist models.

In Western feminist discourses, agency and option with respect to religious women are linked to the liberal notion of emancipation. The emphasis is that secularism champions autonomy and self-expression. In this approach, religion is considered backward and oppressive while secularism is considered modern (Vuola, 2001). Liberal feminists undermine the subject of female autonomy in relation to religion and the significance of religious women's actions. This signals the hegemonic attitude of Western feminists filtering their arguments through a preconceived secular-liberal framework, which dictates what women ought to be or what they should want. In my opinion, this methodology limits the ability to appreciate the full range of women's actions and the effects of these actions. This is what Vuola (2001) described as a superficial or patronizing view of religion on the part of feminist scholars. She stated:

On the one hand, there is a kind of feminist "blindness" of, or resistance to, the importance of religion for women, especially in its possible positive or liberatory aspects, even when women from different religious traditions claim this to be true for them. On the other hand, there is a "religious paradigm" type of feminist research in which women are seen mainly or only through the lens of religion, especially in research done by Western scholars on Muslim and Third World countries, or at least on a culture and tradition which is not one's own. (p. 2)

The “blindness” to which Vuola refers is part of what motivates my study. Americans and British are constantly reminded by simple things, from airport security screenings to patriotic songs at sports games, that their nation is confronting the War on Terror. In this environment, deferral of individual rights is officially permitted as necessary in order to combat terroristic threats. This also lays the foundation for anti-immigrant sentiment and calls to end multiculturalism.

My intention is to show how Somali diaspora women employ the “positive and liberatory aspects” of their religion and tradition to become involved in the democratic process of their new country. As mentioned, Western feminists are ambivalent about the possibility of Islamic tradition being a liberating force for women. Their religious discourse is related to Orientalism, in which Islam is perceived as a fixed and stagnant belief system rather than a dynamic evolving religion. Hence, there exists a need to incorporate Muslim feminist perspectives and models centered on women from African societies into the research.

My study finds that the overall political interest of the participants in these two locations is shaped and influenced by numerous experiences and both national/local and homeland/transnational factors. Their participation is not limited to electoral politics as much of their political efficacy is accomplished outside of the margins of formal means of political participation.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study in perspective by presenting an overall account of the political participation of the Somali diaspora women in Minneapolis or London. This chapter also outlines the study research questions. The research problematizes the narrow explanation of political participation as well as the paucity of

research about the types and forms of political participation engaged in by Somali diaspora women. Specifically, it seeks to construct the respondents' narratives of political participation using a qualitative method.

Chapter 2 presents the sociopolitical background of the Somali diaspora. I will discuss the pre-civil war political system, as well as the causes of the civil war and mass exodus. In this chapter I argue that in Somalia politics and power have often been intertwined with clan favoritism thus creating the conditions for social fragmentation and marginalization. In particular, due to the hostile political system, Somali women never had equal representation with men. Yet women never gave up their rights and cultivated alternative ways to be relevant in politics and power. The chapter also reviews academic literature on diaspora and immigrant women and political participation and determines that there is a void in the literature, which this research is intended to fill.

Chapter 3 outlines and discusses the main theoretical/analytical frameworks that have informed this study. This will involve conceptualizing the relationships of key concepts such as religion, race, ethnicity, social capital, and intersectionality to one another and understand how they are employed. I will also show how migrant associations and networks have been studied to explain the political participation of immigrant women, specifically by those scholars focusing on a social capital approach.

Chapter 4 introduces research methodology and methods used for data collection. I propose that a feminist perspective is the best approach for my research and highlights important ethical issues. It describes the instruments utilized to gather the data, discusses the sample population, and introduces the method of data analysis. I discuss the strengths and challenges of conducting qualitative research from the status of an insider. I will demonstrate that sharing

ethnicity does not always grant full insider status. Other markers such as locality and class matter. Finally, I focus on the issues of reflexivity and positionality in my research.

Chapter 5 is the first of my empirical chapters. The chapter discusses the type and level of social capital and networks, including mosques, found among first generation respondents and how these influence their political interest. It provides an introduction to some of the key debates surrounding the institutionalization of Islam in Britain and the United States which have informed my research. It offers a critical description of institutions and organizations, which assist migrants in their religious, welfare, and linguistic needs. Then I argue the importance of the contribution of these organizations to the political participation of the respondents. I also suggest that relocated traditional gendered practices provide social capital that can be translated into political capital.

Chapter 6 analyzes in depth the political participation of first generation respondents in Minneapolis and London. The chapter illustrates both the difficulties and opportunities that this cohort experiences within the politics of their new countries. I argue the connections between refugee status, downward mobility, and political interest. I discuss their interest in and information gained about politics, their electoral behavior, and their involvement in other forms of political participation.

Chapter 7 demonstrates that respondents participate in transnational politics and the plans that they put in place in forging their presence in a male dominated clan power structure. This finding is particularly important because scholars in the area of immigrant women and immigrant transnational politics report apathy and disengagement of immigrant women toward transnational political practices.

Chapter 8 examines the ways 1.5 generation respondents frame their discourses about the discrimination and stigmatizations faced at school and the consequences this has on their political participation. It discusses social capital and networks from the context of the younger respondents. It argues that both ethnic and nonethnic networks enhance the political interest of the younger diaspora women. My observation shows that bridging versus bonding social capital sets the framework for the different political choices made by respondents. Examined also are the different kinds of political activities giving voice to the desire of the 1.5 generation respondents to be fully included in a democratic process which embraces their diversity.

Yet my research argues that a common ethnicity by no means suggests similar political patterns. The chapter demonstrates that education, civic skills and age are important factors that impact women's political participation and forms of activism they choose.

Finally, Chapter 9 serves as a conclusion, summing up the findings of the research as it relates to the thesis. I will also reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of my research and suggest some possible areas for future research.

## Chapter 2: Sociopolitical Background of the Somali Diaspora and the Literature Review of Diaspora and Immigrant Women

### **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section gives an overview of the history of Somalia that is relevant to my participants' background and describes the reasons for their migration to the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK). I will also review the resettlement of the Somali community in Minneapolis and London. I will start with discussing Islamic practices and their evolution in current times; following will be explanations of clan influence and the impact of social organizations. Then I will present the resettlement experiences of the Somali people in Minneapolis and London.

The second section discusses the literature of diaspora politics and immigrant women's political participation. My intention in this section is to demonstrate that diaspora and immigrant population's political experiences have aroused the interest of many researchers. That the majority of the current research is focused on the extent to which immigrants are incorporated into the political system; the factors that hamper or promote their incorporation; and the effects of immigrant participation on electoral outcomes. Nevertheless, the majority of these studies assume that the political participation of these populations is gender neutral.

### **Overview of the Social Political History of Somalia—Islam in the Somalia Context**

In Somali culture, Islamic identity is the way of life for Muslims. It provides an all-encompassing set of beliefs and principles generated from both the Quran and the Hadith, which is the prophet Muhammad's, [peace be upon him peace (PBUH)], daily remarks on social and legal matters. The Islamic model reflects a society structured to practice Muslim principles so that there is no separation between the secular and the religious issues (Abdullhi, 2001). Daily

life in the period up to the 1980s was much different from the fundamentalist version of Muslimness portrayed today.

Traditionally, Somalis have not been overly strict in their obedience to Islam while still having foundational Muslim beliefs. Islam was and remains the catalyst—the common denominator—in the life of Somalis. The vast majority of Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Sunnis follow a more conventional Islam.

While there were no major divisions within Somali Islamic faith, there was a strong tradition of Sufi orders. Sufi is a pathway along the mystical branch of Islam. Sufi can be both Sunni and Shia. The Sufi sects “grew from the main order—the Qadiriay—created by the great Moslem saint Cadul-Qadir-Jeelaani in the twelfth century” (Samatar, 1988, p. 25). They were anti-imperialist religious brotherhoods that served as madrasas of learning and religious authority.

Although women were not allowed to be Quran teachers or religious leaders, they managed to create complementary gendered settings where they were able to disseminate Islamic teachings within circles of women. For example, Abdi I. Samatar (2000) observed in his study of women’s mosques in northern Somalia that women formed religious community called Sidaat. In 1970, they organized themselves and built “the first women’s mosque in Somalia, and possibly the first mosque built by women from women in the world” (p. 238). This is not only a testimony to women’s devotion to Islam, but an indication of their ability and desire to provide for the moral development of their children and the stability of their society.

In Somalia up until the early 1980s, the version of Islam observed was progressive and tolerant of other non-Muslim religions that coexisted, albeit in the minority. At that time, Islam

offered more opportunities for women than it does now, and women were allowed to participate in normal activities such as education and employment.

The strong gender segregation that exists currently in Somalia and is almost a norm among many diaspora communities, was unusual in pre-civil war Somalia as women and men used to work side by side. Girls and boys went to mixed schools and even in the religious schools, pupils were not segregated by gender.

In contemporary Somalia, the rise of Al Shabaab fundamentalism has presented a challenge to traditional Sufism. It is important to highlight that “al-Shabaab was radicalized and brought to prominence as a popular Islamist guerilla movement by Ethiopia’s invasion” in 2006 (Wise, 2011, p. 1). This reaction to invaders was a preview to the major changes in the political structure of Somalia. In 2006, after 15 years of warlord rule, the Shari’a courts formed a coalition known as the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which created relative peace and order in the southern and central regions of Somalia. The courts were welcomed, as there was a need to “fill the void left by the disappearance of the official police and judiciary system” (Wise, 2011, p.3). After years of clan fighting and instability in the 1990s, religious leaders adopted Islamic rule in south Somalia as a means of securing legitimacy and restoring law and order. Their development of Shari’a courts in parts of Somalia was of great symbolic importance as Islam permeated the political system.

In the post 9/11 world, the US mistakenly associated the UIC with Al Qaeda, concluding that the UIC represented a serious and violent threat. The 2006 US-backed Ethiopian invasion drove the UIC from power, disrupting the progress, and resulted in the emergence of a far more radical force, Al Shabaab. This group has since merged with Al Qaeda, appealed to hundreds of foreign fighters, and carried out terror attacks both inside and outside Somalia.



## **Somali Social Organization and Clan Identity**

After Islam, kinship—the clan system—is the second most important identity for many Somalis. The Somali population is made up of about 85% ethnic Somalis, with Bantu and Arab minorities comprising about 15% of the total (Eno & Kusow, 2014).

The Somali kinship system is based on a patrilineal agnatic known as the clan (Samatar, 1987). Somali clans have two main lineages, the Samaale and the Sab, with numerous sublineages. In ancestral terms, the Digil and Rahanweyn clan families belong to the Sab, while the Darod, Hawiye, Isaq, and Dir clan families belong to the Samaale. Although the clan families are not strictly territorially delineated, they do tend to occupy distinct geographic locations. While the majority of Somali clans are nomadic or seminomadic pastoralists, the Digil and the Rahanweyn clans are farmers and sedentary herders. Samaale is believed to have given their name to Somalia, demonstrating the dominance of the nomadic pastoralists over all other peoples in Somalia (Gundel, 2009). These clans—Digil, Rahanweyn, Hawiye, Isaq, Dir and Darod—are the majority clans in Somalia.

There are minority clans in Somalia, and they are comprised of three distinct social groups: the Bantu, Benadiri, and Tumat (Hill, 2010). Prejudice against minorities originates from social attitudes and customary law. Minority clans experience socially institutionalized discrimination; for example, they are not given full clan rights, such the ability to serve in leadership or vote on issues, and to survive they have had to affiliate and claim rights by claiming affiliation with the majority clans.

Due to the agnatic kinship perspective within the clan hierarchy, women have less value than men. Yet women are essential to lineage relationships because marriage is an important

channel for the forming of alliances beyond one's own clan group. Through exogamous marriage, that is the selection of a marriage partner from a different clan but within the majority or minority group, women forge bonds with other clan lineages and form interclan connections and harmony (Cassanelli, 1982; Lewis, 1994; Mohamed, 1997b). Thus, marriage has been one of the institutions playing a significant role in the functioning and harmony within clans.

Cassanelli (1982) stated:

Clans were typically the largest exogamous units in Somali society: marriage outside the clan was encouraged because it helped to widen the circle of potential allies that could be called up in time of need. The clan was also a territorial unit. There were certain grazing area associated with each clan and "home wells" to which clan men members returned during the dry season. However, because nomadic movements were conditioned by unpredictable and widely scattered rains, and because pasture was regarded as gift from God to all Somalis, herding units from different clans were often interspersed in same districts. ( p. 19)

According to the above statement, exogamous marriage was important for the development of a clan's power and building of alliances, and yet clan is always framed as a masculine system which disregards women's roles within the clan system.

Caste prejudice and clan prejudices exist in Somalia, and traditionally endogamous marriage with a minority clan is forbidden. This is mainly because pastoral clans consider themselves to be the elite nobility and the holders of the standard of being pure Somalis. They deem themselves to be the descendants of the Arabic nobles who established Somalia. Those who do not physically look like the nomadic clans, particularly the Bantus, are held to be descended from slaves brought from neighboring African countries in the 18th century and are viewed as inferior (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003).

Somalis have a rich culture based on oral traditions and the language, utilizing Arabic and other orthographies "that did not include a written language founded on the Roman alphabet until

1972” (Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009, p. 113). In this oral culture, it was the responsibility of parents to transmit history and customs to their children, for the absorption of the clan's and the family's place in that history (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008).

Lewis (1999) highlighted that the precolonial Somali community was an egalitarian society that practiced a form of *pastoral democracy* characterized by flexible agreements rather than the formal political structures of a contemporary nation-state. Historically, in the pastoral society there was not a ruler from a majority clan. Instead, each clan had its own leader or chief. The clan chief, a male position, was a figure whose leadership was deemed important mainly when a situation called for unity of all the sections of the divided clan system. The distribution of political authority among the Somali corresponded to this fragmented type of society and unified only when the political organization of the segments brought themselves together to discuss a universal issue.

At such times, the order of functioning and values consists of a set of formal agreements among the majority clans, called *xeer*, that defines the rights and the responsibilities of the individual as well as the rule of engagements among various clans. For example, nomadic clan communities observe a concept of shared responsibility for violence or accidents, which is visible in the payment of *Diya*, the blood-vengeance compensation (Lewis, 1999; Samatar, 1988). This precolonial commonwealth and relatively democratic process of handling disputes was steadily dismantled through colonial rule, and later completely destroyed under the dictatorship rule of General Siyad Barre (Abdulkadir & Abdulkadir, 2014). Although initially Barre did destroy the clan system in order to create a democracy, he later brought back the clan system setting his own clan as the government rulers.

## **Civil War and the Mass Exodus**

A growing discontent and brewing insurgency against Barre's regime festered for a long time (see Appendix A). It began in the 1980s with the Northern regions and spread out to the rest of the country culminating in the 1990's by becoming a civil war. Many Somalis underestimated how profound the damages caused by Siyad Barre and his 21 years in power were, which destroyed the conditions necessary to the very existence of Somali society, and thus the collapse of Somalia was inevitable.

Women, who more than men understood the devastation that civil war brought to families and their communities, became peace promoters and sought to end the conflict between clans. They employed many approaches to encourage peace, including acting as emissaries between warring clans. This was made possible through the presence of patrilineal descent and clan exogamy in Somali culture (Gardner & El Bushra, 2004). As mentioned before, a woman bears a double role in an exogamous marriage as a member of her own clan of origin, and simultaneously as an affiliate member of the clan of her husband.

Despite their efforts, the atrocities continued. Women experienced gender-based violence and abuse committed by rival clan militias in the battles for political power. Illustrating the lowest point of the civil war, Abdi (2007) stated, "[r]ape in Somali culture is stigmatizing. Before the war it was rare and severely condemned, making group or clan relations very tense when it occurred," yet rival clans used rape as a weapon of war and as a tool for political gain (p. 5).

Unable to stop interclan atrocities, many women decided to immigrate to the neighboring countries of Kenya and Ethiopia, where refugee camps were built to receive Somalis who

escaped the civil war. Unfortunately, the ordeals continued, as rape and other abuses followed women to the refugee camps. In order to reduce the risk of sexual assault or rape, women started wearing jalabib, wide, loose, and modest cloth that covers the body completely (Abdi, 2007).

Because the refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia were temporary settlements, many women, like the respondents of my research, had the opportunity to move to Western countries with humanitarian resettlement refugee programs. Thus, the Somali refugee flows to Western countries were enabled by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) third country resettlement programs. This is a sponsorship program where nations take part in the UNHCR resettlement programs, accepting refugees in quotas on an annual basis. Based on the UNHCR (2011) report, among the 25 resettlement countries, the United States is the resettlement country that offered the largest number of placements annually. Australia, Canada, and the European countries also welcomed a considerable number of refugees to their countries.

In the meantime developments in Somalia continue to attempt restoration of law and order. Currently, the Somalia government has a clan-based system called the “four point five” formula as a structure for the distribution of political powers. To explain this political system and its disappointment, Eno and Eno (2011) wrote:

The state structure was built on the foundation of a clan power segregation system known as 4.5 (four-point-five). This means the separation of the Somali people into four clans that are equal and, as such, pure Somali, against an amalgamation of various clans and communities that are unequal to the first group and, hence, considered “impure” or less Somali. The lumping together of all the latter communities is regarded as equivalent only to a half of the share of a clan. (p. 137)

The 4.5 clan formula not only restored clan hierarchy and but also evoked again the controversy over claims of kinship. It reinstated women’s political exclusion and eroded Somali women’s ability to exercise their rights. That is because within the traditional Somali clan and

kinship structures, age and gender determine power and value. Men and elders are more influential than young members, and men have authority over women. Thus, in this political system, it is unlikely that a woman would be chosen as the clan representative. As I will discuss in later chapters, some respondents of my research consider themselves agents of change, who support and promote Somali women's political leadership and thus their loyalty and commitment to their homeland from afar constitutes a political force that can work toward the defeat of clan politics.

With resettlement in various Western countries, the Somali community has largely struggled with issues of identity, assimilation and the concept of homeland. These struggles are visible in their processes of self-construction, processes that are common for all displaced people but which vary in form and content and are specially challenging for the Somali who may have settled multiple times in different countries.

### **Somali Community in Minneapolis**

Minneapolis is the largest city in the state of Minnesota. Until the beginning of the 20th century, immigration to Minnesota was dominated by people from Scandinavia, Ireland, and Germany who predominantly practiced various expressions of Christianity (Atkins, 2009). Now, immigrants and refugees from Asia, Africa, and Mexico also call Minnesota home. Minnesota has the largest Somali community in the USA, both for new refugee groups and relocated migrants (Goza, 2007), and Minneapolis has the largest congregation of Somalis in the USA (Abdi, 2015; Horst, 2007).

The large presence of Somalis in Minnesota is due to employment opportunities, reputable social services and the existence of VOLAGs i.e. local voluntary agencies (VOLAGs; Abdi,

2012). While the United State federal government decides who should be accepted and approved as a refugee in the US, the process of resettling the refugees is a local process and is managed by VOLAGs. These organizations sponsor and support the resettlement of the refugee newcomers in their new country (Nawyn, 2005). Some of the largest national VOLAGs organizations, such as Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, and World Relief Minnesota, are based in Minneapolis.

Somalis have an established community in Minneapolis in which they have created an economy that allows them to carve out their own space with ethnic shops, grocery stores, malls, restaurants, beauty salons, religious centers, and schools (Horst 2007). Nevertheless, carving out this ethnic space was not easy. When Somali refugees first arrived, they experienced strong othering attitude from the general public. Much of this hostility was directed at their faith, as most Somalis are Muslim. As devout Muslims adhering to religious codes of conduct, the Somali presence in Minneapolis and the need for accommodations for their religious rites, such as halal food, the construction of worship spaces, and the use of public spaces for prayers, as well as the loosening of workplace dress codes, challenged both secularism and the norms of a Christian nation. Hijab-wearing Somali women have experienced more animosity than their male counterparts. Yet, Somali refugees persevered and maintain a stable community adding their culture and religion to the existing culture which results in the noticeable diversity of Minneapolis. Community-based organizations like the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota played important roles in the social, cultural, and economic adaptation and incorporation of the new arrivals.

Though Somalis have struggled and are considered last arrival refugees (Abdi, 2012; 2015; Horst, 2007), there is evidence that they do participate in mainstream sociopolitical

activities without abandoning their cultural/religious tradition. A case in point is when “women participate in union wearing purple hijab, purple being the color of the union” (Roble & Rutledge, 2008, p. 14).

For refugees, even if returning to the country of origin is not realistic, the hope of returning endures. Many Somalis have maintained relations with their homeland and retain a strong identity and awareness connected to homeland memory and their society of origin (Kusow & Bjork, 2007). This transnational capacity is recognized within Somali Minnesotans (Horst 2007) who assume a pivotal role in drawing much-needed attention to the crisis in Somalia. Somali diasporas are politically engaged in Minneapolis (Roble & Rutledge, 2008) with the goal of advancing both a local and a national political agenda that would contribute to the social/political development of the Somali community. With the largest Somali diaspora community in North America, Minneapolis became the center for Somalian political and humanitarian fundraising.

### **Somali Diaspora in London**

In contrast to the US, Somali communities in Britain are among the UK's oldest immigrant communities. Somalis arrived in the 19th century as seamen and settled in Cardiff, Liverpool, and South Shields (Ewald, 2000). A more stable community was created in the 1960s, when women and children joined that largely male community (Cole & Robinson, 2003).

The massive migratory wave of Somali asylum seekers to Britain started in the 1980s as a result of political instability and massive human rights violations that eventually caused the 1991 civil war. These refugees prompted changes in the structure of Somali communities in Britain as



a large percentage of the new arrivals were women and children, either joining their husbands/fathers, or single mothers and widows who had lost husbands in the war (Harris, 2004).

Another important migration phase in Britain has been the influx of Somalis largely from other European countries, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (Sporton & Valentine, 2007; Van Liempt, 2011). According to Van Liempt (2011), many Dutch Somalis left the Netherlands for the UK because of disappointment with their situation in the Netherlands, both in terms of economic opportunities and the freedom to practice Islam. She stated many of these relocated Somalis “moved to places where there was already an established Somali community such as Bristol, the East End of London, Liverpool, and Sheffield” (p. 254).

London hosts the largest British Somali population in UK (COMPAS, 2004). One of the reasons for mass migration to London is its pluralistic and multicultural society compared to the rest of European countries. Nearly every ethnic group, race, nation, tradition, and religion in the world has some presence in London. The Muslim population of London is perhaps the most diverse anywhere in the world, besides Mecca (Wood, Landry, & Bloomfield, 2006). Somalis are among those who have an established community in Greater London.

Britain’s engagement with multiculturalism, which seemed at first to offer much, now raises questions. In this regard, Hall (2000) asked, “How then can the particular and the universal, the claims of both difference and equality, be recognized? This is the dilemma, the conundrum—the multi-cultural question—at the heart of the multi-cultural’s transruptive and reconfigurative impact” (p. 235).

The Somali diaspora has the unique position of living out this conundrum. Recent research investigates their claim that the community faces challenges in multicultural Britain.

The Somali community is one of the most marginalized ethnic minorities in Britain (Harris 2004). They are reported to be the most deprived community, distressed by high levels of unemployment, low levels of educational achievement, and poor housing conditions (Change Institute, 2009). There is a striking similarity of this struggle for the diaspora communities of Minneapolis and London. This suggests that there is a strong resettlement-related distress shared by both communities.

However, the standards of evaluation and the definition of basic terms relating to successful integration can be complicated. First, the Somali diaspora's settlement is still ongoing (Abdi, 2015; Fuglerud & Engebrigtsen 2006) and the constant new arrivals overshadow the integration that is actually happening (Waters, 2013). Secondly, as Saggar and Somerville (2012) suggested, it is not diversity per se that impacts cohesion, but economic frustration. They also observe that policy affects immigrants' adjustment. They state:

Some relatively new immigrant groups (e.g., Somalis and Sri Lankans), many of whom enter as refugees, have very poor employment outcomes. The question is how far their skills, knowledge, awareness, and lack of employment-related networks preclude advancement and how far policy (which, for example, bars access to the labor market during the asylum process) is responsible. (Saggar & Somerville, 2012, p. 19)

Law enforcement and other government agencies have raised concerns about the community's fragmentation and unreceptiveness to cohesive integration into the British system. Their disengagement with the institutions and mainstream British culture has created an image of being an "invisible community" (Griffith 2002; Harris, 2004 p. 10).

The Somali community is the largest African immigrant community to be naturalized in Britain (Hassan et al., 2008), yet this important status has not reduced the debilitating consequences of marginalization and discrimination. While Somalis are members of a black

minority (Harris, 2004), these issues seem not limited to race. The animosity toward Somalis comes from both the majority White and ethnic populations. Hostility has been driven by Islamophobia, language barriers, and a growing fear that there will not be enough resources to go around. The media exacerbates the situation by perpetuating stereotypes (Change Institute, 2009).

According to Hassan et al. (2008), research participants, including younger generations that were either born or grew up in UK, report difficulties in identifying themselves as British. They state that:

Participants differentiated between being a legal citizen (i.e., a British passport holder) and being 'British.' Many expressed the opinion that being a citizen did not grant them automatic acceptance within the dominant society, i.e., it made you a 'Brit' but not 'British.' Participants indicated that becoming British had more to do with cultural identity rather than legality. A facilitator proposed that Britishness suggested acculturation at odds with Somaliness; however, participants replied that on the contrary it was British society that was at odds with them and, as one participant remarked it was, "Somalis who were the victims." (Hassan et al, 2008, pp. 8-9)

This highlights that integration requires mutual accommodation by all. Saggat and Somerville (2012) argued that integration and social cohesion involves social adjustments by both the migrants and the receiving society. Citizens "who are constructed to be members of other ethnic, racial and national collectivities, are not considered 'to belong' to the nation-state community, even if formally they are entitled to" (Yuval-Davis, 2007, p. 10).

### **Trends in the Research of the Diaspora and Immigrant Political Integration and Transnationalism**

The political participation of immigrants and diaspora populations is analyzed differently. Many scholars prefer to use the term diaspora community instead of immigrant or migrant community, because diasporas suggest agency and a strong engagement and connection with the

homeland on cultural, political, economic, and social levels (Faist, 2010). The literature of diaspora political involvement is also analyzed within the homeland framework and two polarized views dominate the field. One group of researchers highlights diaspora as a negative influence and a force that harbors grievance or contributes to armed conflicts in their homeland (Berdal, 2003; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Lyons, 2007). Others emphasize the role of the diaspora members as positive agents contributing not only to the economic development, but also to the peace process and the national rebuilding (Frost, 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2006; Zack-Williams & Mohan, 2002).

The Somali diaspora studies report both positive and negative effects of diaspora subjects to the Somalia affair (Gundel 2002). However, due to Somalia's unique circumstances (for many years Somalia was without a functional central government), research focused on the positive contribution of the diasporas to the homeland such as engagement in peacebuilding (Cassanelli, 2004; Hammond, 2007; Harris, 2004; Kleist, 2008; Menkhaus, 2002) and economic development and remittance (Horst, 2008; Lindley, 2006; Oucho, 2008; World Bank, 2006).

Two issues emerge from the studies regarding diaspora and political engagement. First, as Ragazzi (2009) pointed out, the literature is trapped in an essentialist approach toward diaspora groups that tends to assume that all diaspora subjects behave the same way. Second, diaspora subjects' political experience in their new country is an under researched topic. This makes it easy to assume that diaspora subjects either show no interest in the new country's politics or that they have been so incorporated that there is no meaningful difference between their political behavior as compared to the rest of the society.

Scholarship on immigrant political participation instead calls for attention to immigrant's political participation in the new country, and some of these studies discuss the level that immigrants assimilate or integrate into the political mainstream (Garbaye 2005; Junn, 1999; Ramakrishnan 2005; Saggar 2012). Other studies use transnationalism as an analytical tool to generate an appropriate research agenda in order to study contemporary migrants and their political ties and advocacy to the country of origin (DeSipio 2006; Jones-Correa, 1998; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad 2008; Vertovec, 2007). These latter scholars also considered the political interconnectivity of homeland and resettled country and the ways these two feed each other. Transnational political movements place an emphasis on informal political actors who construct a politics that crosses state boundaries (DeSipio 2008; Jones-Correa, 1998; 2004; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad 2008), and that does not hinder political engagement and incorporation in the receiving nations (Pantoja, 2005). These studies neglect gender as it relates to the ways immigrant and diaspora women engage in the politics of their new country. As we will next a few studies highlight gender differences in political participation,

### **Literature on Immigrant Women and Political Participation**

Current studies of immigrant women and political engagement focuses on three main sets of explanatory factors: micro-level (human capital, resources, and skills) as advanced by McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011), Read (2007), and Lien (1998); macro-level (social and political structures), which is detailed by Hardy-Fanta (1993), Jones-Correa (1998), Takhar (2007; 2012), Fisher (2002; 2012), and Lien (1998); and meso-level (organizational social capital and network), that is employed by McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011), Takhar (2007; 2012), and Fisher (2002).

Drawing from the micro level approach, Lien (1998), McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011), and Read (2007) explained women's political engagement in the UK and US. In their investigation, the authors demonstrate the importance of intra-group differences and they look at how education and socio-economic status in the UK and US influence women's political interest. McIlwaine & Bermudez discover that among Colombians in London, working class women are more likely than working class men or middle-class women to engage in politics both conventional and unconventional. They maintain that working class women tend to challenge gender regimes more than middle class women, who are least likely to be involved in politics given their greater desire to return to Colombia.

Read's (2007) research on gender differences in Arab Muslim political attitudes finds that women with higher education and economic status have higher levels of involvement than do those with lower socioeconomic statuses. She asserts that Arab-American Muslim women exhibit high levels of political engagement compared to other groups in the US and to their counterpart Arab women living in Arab Nations. Arab Muslim women vote along Democratic Party lines, consistent with the general female population pattern. Discrimination is listed among the factors that influence women's political participation as Muslim women are more subjected to direct discrimination.

Lien (1998) emphasizes that socioeconomic status is an important variable for the differences in political participation between whites and nonwhites with minority women showing less participation when compared to their male counterparts and white women. She asserts that Asian women and Latinas are less involved in electoral politics and that "when race enters the equation, being female remains a booster factor for both whites and blacks, but not for Latinos and Asians" (p. 878).

Other scholars advance a macro-level approach to explain patterns of immigrant women's political engagement. Hardy-Fanta (1993) and Jones-Correa (1998) used an institutional framework to analyze Latina American's involvement in the communities and political organizations. Based on a study of Latinos in Boston, Hardy-Fanta (1993: 3) argues that there are relevant differences between the way Latinas and Latinos do politics. The idea of politics advanced by Latin women is one of a "participatory model" based on social interaction, "connections between people, connections between private troubles and public issues and connections that lead to political awareness and political actions." In contrast the men's political model is based on pure self-interest, power, status and hierarchy. Though Hardy-Fanta's study centers on political participation in Boston, she briefly addresses the impact of homeland politics on US participation. She indicates that the difference between the structure of opportunities for political participation in the US compared to the homeland is an important variable determining Latino participation in the US. Hardy-Fanta's work does not employ a transnational perspective.

Jones-Correa's (1998) research of Latinos in New York City does. He explains that immigrant men are interested in transnational politics and dual-citizenship because they experience loss of status and social position in the United States. Most of them that had professional jobs in their home country, but in the US they are employed in low skilled jobs. To make up for this unfulfilling life circumstance in the US, immigrant men tend to invest time and effort into the development and politics of their country of origin. Instead, due to an improved life in the US, Latinas have more interest in participating in the receiving country's sociopolitics. As mothers and homemakers, they have strong connections with America's social institutions, namely schools, welfare, and child and health care agencies, rather than their country of origin's political affairs. He asserted that while men were busy establishing status boosting ethnic

organizations where top leaders were all male, women were charting out important roles such as mediators between community members and governmental institutions. These experiential differences shaped gendered mobilization and political activism in the Hispanic immigrants of New York.

Fisher (2002) and Takhar (2007), in investigating respectively Caribbean and South Asian Britons' political orientations, suggested that proper analytical structure of immigrant women's politics is in terms of macro-meso. The authors maintained that grassroots organizations have been instrumental for women's political engagement and participation. They alleged that community organizations create networks that allow women to bond and build a coalition that brings changes to oppressive households and biased institutions.

Fisher (2002) highlighted the heterogeneity of British ethnic minority women and their approach to politics which blends personal matters into political relationships. British ethnic minority women are from various African and Asian countries and backgrounds; nevertheless *Black* was the political term that united them. These women's needs included jobs, protection, and refuge, as well as guidance ways to contribute policy change that addresses racial equity and violent patriarchal practices. Community organizations like Southwark Black Women's Centre (SBWC) continue to be the places to go for support as they provide a platform for women to express ideas on strategies for gender equality.

Takhar (2007) observed South Asian women's capacities of political agency. Not only do they possess political agency, she stated, but they are actively engaged in politics. The type of politics that stems from the reaction of immigrant women's struggle with "triple oppression" (i.e., gender, race, and culture; p.152). She pointed out that while racist practices have become the central organizing principle of ethnic minority women framing their struggle within Black



feminism, other factors also play important roles. South Asian women, who are born or have lived in the UK for most of their lives, construct political consciousness as a way to respond to racism and because of disappointment and ambivalent treatment by the gendered traditional practices.

Both Fisher (2002) and Takhar (2007) described the ways that African-Caribbean and South Asian women navigate through Britain's challenging system of rights within the context of multiculturalism. Solidarity and visions of mutuality became for these women the basis of an alternative way of participating in politics. Studies of immigrant women and political participation demonstrates that immigrant women do not form a homogeneous group defined by their sex alone; other factors such as economic status, religion, opportunity, and discrimination also contribute to their decisions and modes of participation.

These studies have made great strides explaining gendered aspects of immigrants' political participation. Their research, however, focuses on immigrant women and their political integration in the new country, whereas my research is about the Somali diasporic and their political participation both in the country of origin and the country of resettlement. Also, my respondents' accounts suggest being heterogenous. In the next chapter I will present the organizing concepts of my research.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

### **Introduction**

In the formulation of a theoretical perspectives for studying the Somali diaspora women and their political participation, my research draws upon different theoretical frameworks: postcolonial feminist, transnational feminism, Islamic feminism, intersectionality, social capital, and diaspora. These different frameworks do not contradict each other and each one addresses different aspects of the research questions.

### **Postcolonial Feminism**

Postcolonial feminist theory is a vast concept and an umbrella term which refers to different kinds of feminist theories based on ideas from postcolonial theory and critical studies of race, religion and ethnicity that share theoretical and political interest in intersections between race, ethnicity and religion (Lykke, 2010).

Theoretically and politically, postcolonial feminists challenge the problematic thought that women are a universal group and reject the idea of a global sisterhood. Thus, the analysis of what truly unites women is crucial in order to understand feminist movements and the similarities and differences in the struggles of women globally. Postcolonial feminists strive to understand the simultaneous engagement in more than one distinct but intertwined emancipatory battle (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Carby, 1982; Choudhury, 2009; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Mohanty, 2003; Minh-Ha, 1989; Narayan, 1997; Spivack, 1985, 1997). These authors argue that western feminists participate in “discursive colonization” when they appropriate the experiences of non-white and non-western women to support arguments that benefit them, thereby elevating their own positions (Mohanty, 2003, p. 62).

Postcolonial feminism provides theoretical resources that speak well to the concerns of culture, power, and social inequality. It is a theory that seeks to incorporate the struggle of women immigrants and diaspora into the broader feminist movement. Due to the experience of my respondents, I explore two postcolonial subfields, namely transnational feminism and Islamic feminism.

### **Transnational Feminism**

The transnational feminist academic paradigm draws from postcolonial feminist theories. The association between the postcolonialism and transnationalism in feminist thought can be located in the works of Mohanty (2003), and Spivak (1988). These seminal articles can be considered key texts in transnational feminism in that they problematized Western feminist theories that have the tendency of universalizing women's experiences. They articulate their goal of emphasizing that third world women have voice and agency and that often liberal feminism is guilty of following the colonial project of othering.

The literature on transnational feminism is going through a transition. In the 1980s and 1990s, the focus was on third world women and the ways they were stereotyped and constructed as victims, which Mohanty, Spivak and others critiqued in their writings. Currently, due to the latest migration flow of women from global south to global north, and the fact that technological advancements have facilitated migrants' participation in activities taking place in their nation of origin, recent scholarship focuses on migrant women's transnational practice and whether transnational feminism fosters liberatory agendas or inhibits them (Mojab & Gorman, 2007; Salih, 2010, 2013).

A definition of transnationalism is “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995, p.7). In their intervention, Schiller and colleagues have contested the concept that migration is a linear project that predicts a steady, generational transition in which immigrant groups distance themselves from country of origin and assimilate in the new country, take on the demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics of natives.

Like many other sociopolitical concepts, transnationalism is contested, yet two dominant frames appear to be leading the debate: First is transnationalism from below, which conceptualizes migrant practices of engaging their country of origin in economic, cultural, and political terms (Portes 1999; Smith & Guarnizo 1998). The second frame is transnationalism from above and conceptualizes home country policies that direct the transnational activities of migrants (Itzigsohn, 2000; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Transnational feminisms support transnationalism from below. Alexander and Mohanty (2003) maintained that a transnational feminist paradigm connects the local to larger cross-border processes and that individuals, rather than the state, should be the main agents in defining the worldwide economic and political processes that impact their lives.

Transnational feminism offers a complete perspective to examine resettlement as a relational process with attention on connections, practices, and organizations crossing nation-state borders, rather than the bounded and unconnected notions of emigration and immigration. In my research, I define transnational involvement as practices and relations which span national borders but my focus is narrowed to the study of diaspora women and political participation.

Salih (2010) also argued that women participate in transnational public spheres but she believes that women's full participation in transnational political practice is yet to be realized. She discusses the transnational activism of Middle Eastern and North African diaspora women living in Europe as their attempt to achieve social and civic equality both in their country of origin and their new country. Salih underscores the powerful opportunities associated with transnational feminism and the development of alliances and networks for revising discriminatory laws and the empowerment that can occur when women organize themselves. Yet she stated "that while women can acquire empowering tools, they are not always able to dismantle boundaries or weaken old hierarchies" (Salih, 2013, p. 54).

Mojab and Gorman (2007) analyzed diaspora Kurdish women's transnational activism and their effort to organize against mutually constituting relations of patriarchy and nation-states. Their study focused on diaspora Kurdish women's feminist networks and organizations located in Canada, United Kingdom, and Sweden and the influences these women's groups had on the state-building process of the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. According to the authors, Kurdish "diasporan women in the West have acquired a diversity of skills, which empowers them to make significant contributions to reconstruction and democratization" of their homeland (Mojab & Gorman, 2007, p. 59). Nevertheless, Kurdish diaspora women struggle with the dilemma to "choose between a focus on national liberation for Kurds and a feminist agenda, due to the patriarchal character of Kurdish national liberation organizations on the one hand, and the intrusion of the state on the other" (Mojab & Gorman, 2007, p. 66).

The above studies offer profound gendered lenses through which it is possible to analyze the dynamics of transnational processes. They emphasize the ways diaspora women utilize their broad-based citizenship rights and develop activism strategies within transnational contexts that

privilege discourses on human rights and feminist solidarity groups mutually, without accepting a global sisterhood that is built on the first world-third world dynamic (Mohanty, 2003). While this new transnational identity allows diaspora women to organize and attempt to end gender inequalities, they find themselves in a position to choose between the advancement of feminist politics and social change, and the rebuilding of their country of origin with its traditional male dominated leadership, thus reproducing the very forms of power they aim to dismantle.

The transnational research of Salih (2010) and Mojab and Gorman (2007), like many other studies in the field, is centered on institutions and networks that are built through transnational feminist solidarities. Transnational gendered lenses will be used in particular when analyzing first generation respondents' political interest and engagement. However, in contrast to the above scholars, my focus is on diasporic Somali women mainly as individuals and actors situated within networks of relationships.

### **Islamic Feminism**

As part of the broader trend in postcolonial feminisms, Islamic feminism is part of a global and diverse response by women's movements both in Western countries and as part of non-Western nations to contribute equally to the development of civil society and social and gender equality. Rejecting secularist hegemony as the only valid and legitimate form of understanding and interpreting women's life, Islamic feminists propose hermeneutical studies of the Quran, Sunnah, and classical Islamic interpretive tradition in order to dispute patriarchal interpretations and produce new Islamic knowledge that stresses the case for gender equality and justice (Abu-Lughud 2013; Badran 2009; Zine 2001). According to Islamic feminists, the "new gender sensitive Qur'anic interpretation" recognizes the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private (Badran, 2009, p. 244).

Muslim women, in challenging the colonial discursiveness and racist projects that have marginalized and historically misrepresented them, are able to produce theories and praxis drawn from their religious experiences to contest the universalizing Western womanhood. Zine (2001) advocated this when she proposed a “critical faith-centered epistemology framework” (p. 180). Zine’s critical faith centered paradigm is important as it enables Muslim women to open a new and alternative space to ground their theory and praxis from a faith and spiritual framework that can be accommodated within an antiracist feminist approach.

Although many Muslim women believe that their religion can be a source of empowerment, many secular feminist researchers in the West cannot imagine that the Quran can promote gender equality. Instead they view Islam as one of the worst types of patriarchal religion that legitimizes gender inequality (Moghissi 1999; Okin 1999). Critical scholars like Zine (2004), Abu-Lughod (2001), and Mohanty (1984) consider this assumption to be a product of Western ethnocentrism.

Abu-Lughod (2001) argued that connecting Islam to the discourse of women’s oppression is at risk of creating an Orientalist perspective in current times. As Said (1978) pointed out, Orientalism is the way that people in Western cultures often construe Eastern cultures as backward or uncivilized. Orientalism provided a justification for European colonialism over Africa and the Middle East, based on the notion that the Orient is inferior and therefore in need of Western intervention or rescue.

This viewpoint is at the heart of the problem with liberal feminist analysis, and in many respects, it is a continuation of the imperial era perspectives. Choudhury (2009), wrote that “most liberal feminists also have a specific idea of women’s flourishing that prevents it from fully comprehending Muslim women who choose to adhere to Islam, which is, in their view, a

hopelessly patriarchal and gender oppressive religion” (p. 154). Islamophobia is present but in a more subtle way.

Islamophobia is the stigmatization of those who practice Islam (Modood, 2011). Both in the United States and Britain, efforts to distort the teachings of Islam, to discredit and defame Muslims and Islamic organizations, and to marginalize and impugn the religion itself are widespread. Muslims are increasingly stigmatized and seen as suspect communities, whose identity is bound by the process of securitization (Modood, 2009). Again, the debate regarding the value of multiculturalism versus homeland security reveals the misunderstanding by liberal feminists of the needs of the Muslim women and their communities. The veiled woman is at once to be feared, to be pitied, to be sophisticated, and to be saved (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

Islamic feminism as a theory exposes patriarchal cultural practices that are outside the fair message emanating from the Quran and Sunnah, the model behavior of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). It is an approach that allows Muslim women to center traditional and alternative paradigms to the prevailing one and develop alternative sets of questions, techniques, and strategies that fits their experiences. This approach is similar to what this study calls a female religio-cultural framework.

### **Female Religio-Cultural Approach**

In this dissertation, I do not claim that all Somali diaspora women practice Islam in the same manner, nor that they construct rights and identity within an Islamic framework. I am not proposing an essentialized Somali culture and my intention is not to deemphasize women’s self-expression to depict Somali culture. Instead my aim here is to introduce alternative forms of feminist agentic capacity that could take place when monochromatic, homogenized nation-states



such as Britain and America are challenged by their transnational citizens' ways of life in a society that is ever becoming multicultural and multireligious.

In a female religio-cultural approach, I propose that agentic discourse would take content, shape and substance from a conflated religion and culture and reinforce unity and stability among women in Somali diaspora communities. It draws from Zine's (2001) critical faith-centered framework and Werbner's (2002) discussions on translocation of culture.

Like Zine, I believe that Islam is a nonpatriarchal religion with mandates from the Quran and Sunnah to model behavior of the Prophet Mohammed, (PBUH), for the liberation of all human kind.

The female religio-cultural approach challenges and unmask patriarchal cultural practices that are outside the message emanating from the Quran and Sunnah. It supports Zine's (2001) statement that:

Muslim women's feminism and praxis based on a faith-centered epistemological framework requires centering faith-based knowledge construction as a lens through which a particular reading of the world can be constructed and framed. This involves the political and discursive goal of creating a space where faith-centered voices can enter critical academic and political debates and dialogues as valid sites of knowledge and contestation... This framework articulates spirituality in connection with social-justice imperatives and focuses on the ways in which spiritual knowledge can act in service of emancipatory goals. (p.181)

Islamic teaching must of course be rendered meaningful, and many Somali diaspora women have sought more accurate teachings to counter patriarchal interpretations that for so long have been erroneously associated with Islam. In this research, I will demonstrate how Somali diaspora women appropriate the Quran as a means of constructing a liberative hermeneutic that speaks to their circumstances, context, and political engagement. The core values of the Quran are justice, freedom, and collective action for the common good of the

community. Justice gives the foundation and rationale for human agency, purpose, and the need for divine guidance and it must be present in all levels of social life, from one's own family to public relationships with the community and beyond. Social justice in Islam is regarded as universal and is great emphasis as it enables the foundation of a social order that allows individuals to develop their humane qualities and live in peace and harmony.

Werbner (2002) introduced the concept of translocation of culture, which refers to individuals' relocating their traditional practices such as gendered networks, religious holidays, weddings, and more from their country of origin to their new country. She emphasized the dynamics of sense-making and that cultural practices are lived, changed, and readjusted in the new location. Werbner recognized that "[a]s transnational migrants sink roots in a new country they transplant and naturalise cultural categories, not simply because this is their tradition and culture, but because as active agents they have a stake in particular aspects of their culture (p.749)." She reaffirmed that diaspora women not only care about and preserve their culture of origin, but also that "culture as a field of relatedness, *can generate* agency and power" (Werbner, 2002, p. 749; emphasis added).

The female religio-cultural approach highlights translocation of culture as the process of dislocation and relocation where by the diaspora invents and recreates a local culture and viable communities. Many respondents strive to relocate positive elements of the Somali culture, such as respect for the elders, sense of family/communal life, sense of hospitality, motherhood, gentleness, sympathy and genuine caring, women's network, and socialization systems. Culture as a compelling, moral, and symbolic reality confers role and agency on women to engage in the local, national, political, and transnational public spheres. Hence, Somalinimo, that is, being a good Somali who cares about their homeland as well as religiousness and being a devout

Muslim, establishes a resource that empowers certain forms of activism, resistance, and strategy among many of the respondents engaged in politics.

This dissertation argues that active citizenship for the respondents does not mean assimilation, but rather provides a way to add their cultural and religious values to the social fabric of their new country. In following the teaching of the Quran which requires an essentially constructive advancement of social justice and freedom of conscience; the respondents are able to engage in critical discourse that rejects Muslim otherness. Consequently, the moral codes of Islamic faith and Somali culture are particularly central to the political practices of many diaspora members, acting as a crucial mechanism for community solidarity.

The participants strive to make a positive contribution to their societies, and political participation is the avenue towards this positive contribution. Moreover, the reinforcement of Muslim and Somali identity became strategies for many Somali diaspora women to respond both anti-Black and Islamophobic hostility and stigmatization.

Kusow (2004), in analyzing strategies utilized by newly stigmatized diaspora subjects to counter racism and stigmatization, argued that Somali immigrants respond to the stigmatization experience by restoring separate “*systems of honor*”. According to him, this strategy is employed through the creation of an enclave that reproduces the traditional cultural identity that existed in the homeland. This ethnic boundary is emphasized by their choice of clothing as well as everyday cultural repertoire. As a self-identification statement, Somali women choose the visible marker of traditional and religious dress, whereas the Somali males place significant emphasis on religious identity, so they gather in Islamic centers instead of areas that are traditionally frequented by other Blacks, so as to not be identified as racially Black. Kusow asserted that regardless of gender status, Somalis distinguish themselves from the Canadian

mainstream popular culture. They socialize within their ethnic group in other communal functions where Somali folk music and culture is featured. Kusow states:

In essence, Somalis maintain a closed social enclave that attempts to create a complete cultural community separate and distinguishable from mainstream Canadian society. More important Somalis tend to limit their social interactions with native Canadians, reject Canadianness as a possible identity, and ignore the existence of color-based discrimination or stigma (p. 189).

In other words, for Somalis, self-segregation is a mechanism to prevent the assignment of devalued identity markers, and consequently avoid discrimination and stigmatization that can come with Black racial identity (Kusow, 2004).

Kusow's (2004) observation about Somalis in Toronto resonates with how many first-generation respondents who value their Somali culture and use it as means of coping with discrimination, organize, and construct social capital. Additionally although some differences exist between Somalis Canadian, Somali American and Somali British, there are also many similarities regarding cultural retention, avoiding mixing with other mainstream communities, building Somali enclaves, and identifying themselves as Somali and Muslim to avoid being labeled as a part of the Black minority. I do not agree with Kusow's description of homogenous and static identity. For example, the younger generation's experience with race and identity is different and they don't see anything wrong in being identified as black. Being Black offers them an identity and the possibility of belonging and wielding power in politics. Therefore, their response to discrimination and stigmatization is not to shift stigmas (Morosanu & Fox 2013) but to engage in coalition building with other minorities.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Bonilla-Silva (2003) argued that within the political context of the US and Britain, discrimination as a social practice implicates processes that stigmatize and exclude people,

threaten social cohesion, and criminalize minorities and people with immigrant backgrounds. Somali diaspora women's experiences at the intersections of Islamophobia, sexism, racism, nativism, and language prejudice provide them with evidence, ideas, insights, and ambitions that can help solve serious social problems.

Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* as a way to explain the oppression of African-American women in the legal system. Intersectionality can be described as the study of oppressive institutions on disenfranchised groups or minorities and the way these groups are interconnected. The theory is based on the concept that oppressive institutions within a society, such as racism, religious persecution, and sexism, do not act independently, but are instead interrelated and continuously shaped by one another (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1993). As a research paradigm and political tool, intersectionality has been adopted by Black feminists as a practice to contest oppressive and exclusionary forms of White western feminisms that assume a homogenous form of patriarchy and a universal womanhood (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw 1991; Minh-ha, 1989; Mohanty, 2003).

Somali diaspora women are at a theoretically interesting point. As noted before, this study argues that Somali diaspora women are uniquely situated in that they stand at the focal point where various exceptionally powerful and prevalent systems of oppression come together: religion, migration, race, and gender. Thus, some respondents deploy intersectionality to expose the diffuse and differential nature of interlocking forms of oppression, as well as to build a coalition that bring real social change.

### **Social Capital**

According to Putnam (2000), social capital is the “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19).

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (p. 21). Coleman (1988) explained social capital as a social structure that allows people to realize their interests that in its absence would not be possible.

Two common themes run through these definitions: the structural (i.e., social networks) and the attitudinal (i.e., shared norms, trust, and reciprocity). These social networks can be described as community organizations, student organizations, religious institutions, family ties, professional groups and others, such as the butcher shop, the barber, or child care centers—anywhere there is regular contact that belies a sense of belonging.

For the purposes of this study, I conceptualize social capital as the connections between and among people and actors that produce desired outcomes. According to social capital theory, actors exist at many organizational levels and include voluntary organizations, religious institutions, neighborhoods, and educational institutions (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

Scholars have associated political participation with a concept of social capital (e.g., networks of associations, trust, and norms) that fosters collective action (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998a; Putnam, 2000). Although social capital is said to have positive consequences for democracy, it has been noted that all forms of social capital are not equal and differences exist between bonding social capital and bridging social capital. “Bonding” social capital occurs via close-knit ties among similar individuals, groups, or communities, whereas “bridging” forms ties between heterogeneous individuals or groups and connect people to new resources deemed necessary for progress (Putnam, 2000).

The bridging form of social capital is more favorable for political involvement and for the strength of democracy. Indeed, non-ethnic networks facilitate the building of varied and more generalized trust that, in turn, stimulates the sense of civic mindedness and group cohesiveness from which democratic systems are founded (Putnam 2000). By contrast, the close-knit bonding fostered by co-ethnic networks are believed to weaken group cohesiveness in the wider society and to promote the forming of group-based values and norms that encourage the withdrawal from political participation by newcomers (Morales & Pilati, 2011).

Studies documenting immigrant women's political participation highlight both the differences between bridging and bonding networks, as well as the importance of formal social interaction, such as membership in voluntary groups, as a source of political involvement (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998a; Landolt & Goldrins, 2009; McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2011; Read, 2007). Some of these scholars posit that both bridging and bonding social capital have similar influence, as they cause increased political activity by immigrant women (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2011; Takhar, 2007). Others' works demonstrate that bonding social capital has a more positive impact upon women's political activities (Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998a).

For example, Hardy-Fanta (1993) pointed out that, contrary to the viewpoints that "the intimate bonds between family members, close friends, neighbors, and co-workers are limited in their ability to generate political participation (Granovetter, 1973, 1982), Latinos in Boston clearly hold the view that these personal ties create bridges to politics" (p. 41). This chapter agrees with Hardy-Fanta regarding the first-generation respondents and will demonstrate that bonding social networks linked with mutual trust provide important contacts that can build opportunities and capacities for them to participate in politics.

To make sense of my subjects' bonding social capital, we must take into account both structural and immigration factors that contribute to the realities within which these respondents navigate in building their social networks. Both London and Minneapolis Somalis are congregated together because of housing and labor discrimination (Abdi, 2012; Harris, 2004) and to avoid intense anti-Muslim/Somali sentiment. For example, the majority of the first generation women interviewed, 16 out of 20, reside in neighborhoods with large Muslim or Somali populations because they felt a sense of belonging. Their social life, employment, business, news outlets, and faith connections rely heavily on coethnic resources. Their desire to live and work in Somali ethnic enclaves is compounded by the structural discrimination that exists in Minneapolis and London, which disproportionately affects Muslim women chiefly because of their dress codes. All these factors have contributed to respondents' preferences to build coethnic social networks. Therefore, I anticipate more similarity than difference between the two locations' respondent groups in how they access and utilize bonding social capital.

However, even though the women have limitations in establishing cross-ethnic ties, this does not mean that their bonding social capital cannot assist them to cultivate the skills required to engage in civic affairs. To the contrary, their bonding networks and organizations help them to participate in the general life of their local cities.

### **Defining Diaspora**

The term *diaspora* originates from the Greek word, *diasperien*, a compound of *dia*, meaning "across," and *sperien*, meaning, "to sow or scatter the seeds" (Brazier & Mannur, 2003, p. 1). Traditionally, diaspora was associated with the dispersion of the Jews, and later expanded to include other groups perceived to share the Jewish historical experience of traumatic mass displacement, such as Armenians, Palestinians, and Africans (Cohen, 2008).



Diaspora in its more contemporary context describes a wide range of people living outside of their homeland, and currently a wide spectrum of immigrants appropriates the diaspora term. Even marginalized communities that once may have regarded their position in the context of majority-minority power relations are now adopting diaspora discourse as an alternative (Clifford 1994). According to Brubaker (2005), together with its popularity, the term has resulted in an inflation of usage and interpretations.

This begs the question of how useful is a concept that has no consensus on a definition or relevance within the field of migration studies. An underlying impulse in asking this question is, if all diasporas involve a migration, but not all migrations necessary develop into diasporas (Skeldon 2003), how can diaspora be described in relation to more general denotations of migrated or dispersed populations?

A large number of scholars have attempted to address this question by providing a definition and characteristics that can be taken as the paradigm of diasporic identification. William Safran (1991) established certain criteria to which a potential diasporic group must adhere such as that the group (a) have been dislocated from their native land and relocated to two or more countries; (b) are forced from their disparate homeland by shared vision, memory or myth about their homeland; (c) believe that they will not blend in with the host society and face rejection and consequently they must establish their self-sufficiency; (d) consider their ancestral homeland as their only true home and plan to return when the conditions become favorable; (e) believe that they have the responsibility to rebuild the original homeland; (f) are linked to that homeland in one way or another, and their origin and solidarity are defined by the existence of such a connection. As it can be noticed from this list ethnicity and culture primacy are the defining features in the conceptual vocabulary used by Safran. Clifford (1994) observed that

Safran's objectivist criteria for identifying diaspora are based on the "ideal type" that mainly fits the struggle of Jewish diaspora. Thus, this model should not be taken as the normative approach for a diaspora discourse that explores new global conditions.

Cohen (2008) recognized the role that global movement and discourses have in the shaping of diasporas, and in building on and revisiting Safran's diaspora typology, he applied the traditional diaspora categories to groups that have experienced displacement under different mobility patterns, whether forced or voluntary. He proposed the following typology: victim, labor, imperial, trade, and cultural. According to him, no diaspora fits neatly into only one of these types, and his aim to typologize diasporas is "not by ignoring what they share in common, but by highlighting their most important characteristics" (p. 29). Cohen revealed positive aspects of diaspora communities, such as creative productions that their experiences and mixed identities may generate. He also recognized that diaspora solidarity goes beyond one host country and homeland, and extends to the same ethnic communities in other countries

Even though the characteristics outlined by classical theorists are valuable when describing the experiences of diaspora members oriented towards homeland, these characteristics are not entirely applicable for younger-generation diasporas that lack a myth of return. For instance, while the respondents of my study share experiences of dispersal and a collective identity (the latter is not fixed, and sometimes relies on situational and contextual provisions, as we will later see), not all of them call Somalia the true home, as Minneapolis, or London, is their true home as well.

The classical perspective has been challenged and alternative postmodern approaches that step away from the limiting notions of identity that center solely on the nation-state have been proposed (Bra, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Hall, 1990, 1993). The postmodern thesis offers an

analytical framework to fully understand the phenomenon of diaspora as a social condition and societal process. Their approach addresses the life experiences of members of diaspora, such as the younger generation who do not meet many of the criteria detailed by Safran and Cohen and yet do inhabit diaspora.

Postmodernists' perspective of diaspora yields some extremely useful insights. For one, their approach resists the nation-state, which is viewed as hegemonic, discriminatory, and culturally homogenizing. Also, by considering placement rather than displacement and traumatic aspects of diaspora and focusing on the interaction of difference and identity negotiation, their approach deals with the experience of diaspora subjects who feel closer affinity to the resettled home. However, some scholars take a critical view of this approach.

Werbner (2002) agreed with postmodernists' position on diaspora social heterogeneity and their historical formations, which are in process, but she disapproved of the postmodern version of diasporas for minimizing the importance of "attachments to a place of origin and/or collective historical trauma" for the late modern organization of diasporas (Werbner 2000, p. 4). Cohen (2008), on the other hand, maintained that postmodernists attempted to deconstruct the two key elements previously found as defining of the diasporic idea, namely homeland and ethnic communities. In addition there are worries that within diaspora studies the risk of *groupism* may arise.

### **Diaspora and the Dangers of Groupism**

Diaspora's preoccupation with national or ethnic origins can also mean that diasporic discourse omits internal divisions with ethnic communities or to the likelihood of selective cultural negotiations between communities. In this regard, Anthias (1998) stated that "the lack of

attention given to transethnic solidarities, such as those against racism, of class, of gender, of social movements, is deeply worrying from the perspective of the development of multiculturalism, and more inclusive notions of belonging” (p. 577). This concern has much in common with work on intersectionality.

Brubaker (2005) acknowledged that the literature of diaspora focuses on three core elements: dispersion in space, orientation to a homeland, and boundary maintenance. But he argued that thinking of diaspora as if it were a substantial entity and a countable social fact is inaccurate, and cautioned the misleading potential of taking this entity as a legitimate category of analysis. He argued that attention needs to be paid when discussing diaspora-like “ethnic groups” and “nations” that were wrongly accepted as entities resembling real demographic substance in order to prevent groupism. Brubaker explained groupism as the tendency of treating ethnic groups as fundamental units of social analysis, being accepted as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be credited. Hence, to avoid falling into the trap of accidental groupism, it is best to study diaspora as “a category of practice” that is “used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties” by agents of group-making projects (Brubaker, 2005, p. 12).

Groupism has also been identified as a danger facing the study of transnationalism. As discussed early, Salih (2013) demonstrated how migrants’ genders, socioeconomic positions, and immigration statuses impact access to social and political networks and capital. According to her, transnational domains are inscribed in specific cultural and normative restrictions, just some of the “crucial arenas that determine very different kinds of transnational strategies” (p. 10).

Brubaker’s idea of studying ethnics and diaspora without groups has been challenged. For example, Craig Calhoun (2003) contests the idea that collective identity, that is, ethnic and

nation belonging, does not matter because the groups that they represent are not natural ones. He argues that promoters of cosmopolitanism, including Brubaker, fail to recognize the central role that, “social solidarity or of the role of culture in constituting human life,” plays and don’t recognize the role any declarations of loyalty to any particular solidarity, such as nations communities or ethnic groups, play (Calhoun 2003 p. 535). Calhoun asserts that cosmopolitanism displays an elitist perspective that values an individualistic approach.

The diaspora discussions demonstrate that questions on diaspora remain open. Regardless of the dilemmas concerning the term, the diaspora concept is useful, by making it easy to connect the “‘before and after’- distinction” often used when discussing human mobility. Through this concept, refugees are seen as subjects with agency, rather than objects. “The concept of diaspora seems to encompass the transnational and de-territorialized social relations of refugees as well as to outline the specific refugee experience” (Wahlbeck 1999, pp. 30-31). Dual centrality, that is, a diasporic community organized by maintaining transnational connections, and loyalties to an original homeland that foster an interest in a new homeland, can coexist (Werbner, 2000).

### **Diasporas’ Dual Centrality**

Werbner (2000) views diasporas as historical formations in process, changing over time and responding to the different political and social contexts in which their members find themselves. She considered that the separation between different approaches to understanding diaspora is unproductive. According to her, the diasporas’ conditions of incompleteness do not necessarily require a resolution because of the “dual orientation of diaspora communities: on the one hand, to fight for citizenship and equal rights in the place of settlement, often alongside other ethnic groups; and, on the other, to continue to foster transnational relations and to live with” a

feeling of dislocation and of allegiance to other places and groups beyond the place of settlement (Werbner, 2000, p. 5). The transnational activities include monetary remittances, migrant entrepreneurship, the collective transfer of resources, as well as political activities that consist of direct participation in political processes, political affiliation, and political mobilization in the host country. Although people move to different places, they still engage in transnational activities because they feel responsible for their loved ones, and in the case of some refugees, they also feel responsible for coethnics staying in their country of origin, which, due to dire circumstances, need their assistance.

As for how diaspora subjects negotiate identities and build senses of belonging in the new country, Werbner (2000) indicated that concepts of the collective are negotiated and ethnic boundaries are crossed as individuals invoke multiple positions. She argued identity in the diaspora spaces has to be considered in relation to other competing identities, values, and interests. The flexibility in affirming ethnic identity may be contingent on the immediate social situation, so that an individual's membership in a particular group is determined by the values, interests, and motives that influence behavior in that situation. Diaspora subjects live successfully with contradictions, and their identity, which depends on situations or circumstances, is changeable by the subjects within a certain framework. Because they bear multiple identities, their boundary attachment arises from situational factors. That means, when vantage points change, they change with them for the maximization of benefit. Therefore, in Werbner's view, diasporas are both ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan; the challenge is "to disclose how the tension between these two tendencies is played out in actual situations" (Werbner, 2000, pp. 15-16).

In this study, I employed the concept of diaspora to discuss the sociopolitical experiences of my respondents because being Somali is part of the self-definition of many Somalis in Minneapolis and London. Equally, the identity of the new country is important for the majority of Somalis, demonstrated by the increase in hyphenated identities adopted by various Somali communities. I find Werbner's approach the ideal because it is flexible and integrative. It is an approach that examines the various (often opposing) discourses, practices, or projects to traverse diasporic spaces, while all identifying with the Somali diaspora. It offers insight into the ways Somali diaspora women utilize those spaces to (re)define Somaliness, or rather, what denotes being a Somali in diaspora.

### **The Somali Diaspora**

Somali diaspora is a fairly new subject of study, as it unfolded in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, it has gained the attention of academics within diaspora and migration studies. The Somali diaspora literature can be divided into two types. The first type details transnational activities such as financial capital and remittance (Horst, 2008; Lindley, 2006; Oucho, 2008; World Bank, 2006), and engagement in peacebuilding (Cassanelli, 2004; Hammond, 2007; Harris, 2004; Kleist, 2008).

The second type is more concerned with how culture and religion affected diaspora communities' settlement in new society (Abdi, 2012; Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Collet, 2007; Griffith, 2002; Scuglik & Alarcon, 2000; Walters, 2011). This literature presents Somalis as communities struggling with issues of acceptance, identity, adjustment, concept of nostalgia, and a strong desire to return to the homeland (Abdi, 2012; Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Collet, 2007; Griffith, 2002; Hammond, 2007; Harris, 2001; Walters, 2011). According to these authors, members of Somali communities reconstruct the homeland image with respect to the societies of

resettlement. Many of them believe that they should collectively be committed to the rebuilding of their original homeland and to its safety and stability (Abdi, 2012; Horst, 2006; Kleist, 2008). The host country is viewed as a space of repression, anguish, and lack of social status. Instead, Somalia is remembered as the good life, where dignity, honor, and elevated social rank existed (Kusow, 2004).

Giving rise to racism and religious intolerance in Western countries, Somalis in many resettled locations experience challenges when their religion is scrutinized and their country of origin is attempting to stabilize. Somalia is most often in the news for instances of state collapse, terrorism, and piracy. Somalis experience discrimination and stigmatizations both as Africans in Western countries and as Muslims in Western countries. What I contest is the portrayal of Somali communities as passive characters, unable to actively participate in their new society (Abdi, 2015; Griffith, 2002; Harris, 2004; Horst, 2008) and unable to counteract racial and religious hatred.

Moreover, this literature has neglected Somali women and especially their political participation; it does not engage in debates regarding how diaspora members' political consciousness and participation changes, transforms, or mutates across generations and genders. While I acknowledge difficulties and challenges experienced by Somali diaspora communities, my aim in this research is to dispel low expectation as presented in other studies and demonstrate that Somali diaspora women of Minneapolis and London have agency and engage in politics to improve their circumstances.



## Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

### Introduction

This dissertation is based on a qualitative research method and employs semistructured interviews as its main data collection technique. In this study, I ask three questions:

1. Do Somali diaspora women participate in politics in the United States and United Kingdom?

If yes: what and who influences their political participation?

2. How is their political participation shaped by American or British society?

3. What are the social resources and networks that influence the political participation of Somali diaspora women?

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical approaches I used to answer the above questions, which are linked to my qualitative research. These concepts are used to explain the research methods I used to obtain reliable results in the study. The methodology chapter is an important part of the study because it permits an analysis of the theoretical and philosophical background of the study, the ways the subjects are assembled in the study, and how their narratives and experiences can be interpreted. Thus, researchers have enormous responsibility because they are the primary “‘instrument’ of data collection, and qualitative analysis” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). Additionally, because the interviews are the principal qualitative method (explained in detail later) involving conversations and dialogue, language is a valuable resource through which people produce their reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). It would be “naive to think that we will ever develop a theoretical language not profoundly influenced by the social and political forces around us” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 325).

In this chapter, I describe my sample choice, recruitment tactics, approach to the interview process, and data analysis. I explain my experience pursuing research in two cities on two continents with vastly different characteristics, including the approaches I employed to gain access to the research setting and how this impacted my understanding of my research participants. I consider my fieldwork experiences and the benefits of the insider-outsider divide. I explain how I identified the participants and transcribed the data. The methods explained in this chapter have been approved by the ethics committee of the School of Law, Sociology, and Politics at the University of Sussex, and the accepted procedures around consent, data confidentiality, and secure storage of data were observed. That said, convening these requirements was but the start of a research journey fraught with ethical questions. As Bathmaker and Harnett (2010) observed:

[E]ach research situation generates its own ethical questions and issues that demand unique and contextual answers. It is nowhere near sufficient to take refuge in the apparent protection of ethics review procedures and ethical codes because they cannot address the specificities of singular circumstances or the idiosyncrasies of individuals.

(p. 21)

Due to their premigration experiences, some of the first generation respondents found the research protocol uncomfortable and unnecessary. Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss the cultural and contextual issues that influenced my respondents' reactions to data collection methods, the ability of the research to effectively address these issues, and my ability to engage them in the process of informed consent.

### **Feminist Approach for Diaspora Women Research**

Reflecting on the fact that my research focuses on diaspora women's political participation, the adoption of a feminist perspective is necessary for this study. In taking gender as a basic category of analysis, feminist theory validates a woman's life experience as the basis

for unique knowledge (Harding, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2014; Smith, 1988). Hesse-Biber (2007) stated:

To engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include—assuming that when we speak of the generic term men, we also mean women, as though what is true for dominant groups must also be true for women and other oppressed groups. Feminists ask “new” questions that place women’s lives and those of “other” marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry. (p. 3)

The bulk of studies on Somali diaspora members have focused more on economic relations with their homeland through remittances (Horst, 2008; Lindley, 2006; Oucho, 2008; World Bank, 2006), engagement in development and peacebuilding in Somalia (Cassanelli, 2004; Hammond, 2007; Harris, 2004; Kleist, 2008; Menkhaus, 2002) and religious and cultural identity (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Menkhaus, 2009; Scuglik & Alarcon, 2005). As stated before, these writings often omit gender patterns and present information from the male perspective as if the diaspora experience were the same for all.

This research approach exposes critical questions which feminists have frequently raised, including the impact of gendered knowledge, the means for generating awareness of the bias toward the male perspective and how a woman’s point of view can be utilized to benefit women and bring about change in their lives (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The few Somali studies that recognize that perspectives differ by gender (Abdi, 2015; M Al-Sharmani, 2010; Berns McGown, 1999; Hopkins, 2010) do not engage in an in-depth discussion on the impact gender has on political engagement in the diaspora locations. The Somali diaspora women’s relevance goes unnoticed, and consequently, important aspects of their experience and contribution remain undervalued. My study emphasizes that the concepts of diaspora, gender, and politics are simultaneously subjective, structural, and concern social positioning as well as daily practices. Therefore, acquiring a multiplicity of different perspectives from diaspora women of Somali

descent, a minority group within the political discourse, resonates with using a feminist approach. I am particularly interested in how constructions of gender have changed in the diaspora communities, how these constructions are put into practice in the current private and public spheres as compared to back home in Somalia and, most importantly, what implications these changes have on female involvement in political activity.

Certain feminist approaches are distinctive because they make connections and linkages across communities and place. They offer spaces to acquire knowledge for and from immigrant women's networks and negotiations, which contextualize migrant women's experiences and enable their solidarity. Additionally, these perspectives help researchers gather information and understand the multiplicity of immigrant women's experiences and the complexities that play a significant role in supporting or hampering their successful resettlement (Agbényiga & Huang, 2012).

The feminist's method for interpreting research results is an important approach, as it carries with it the idea of choice and individualism (Harding, 2004). It not only respects the perceptions and attitudes of the participants, but it also interprets responses and interactions that reveal participant values and opinions in the context of being studied (Visweswaran, 1988). The interpretative approach allowed me to take into account the diversity that exists among the interviewees, reflective of age and location. It allowed focused examination of the interaction of social integration and political participation, the strategies participants used to pursue their goals and their different levels of political understanding.

### **Selecting the Sites, Community and Gaining Access**

A comparative approach anchors this study. I chose these two sites because they represent significant destinations of the Somali diaspora. Minneapolis, Minnesota has the largest

Somali population in North America (Abdi 2012). It is a city centrally located in the United States and influenced by Scandinavian, German and Lutheran heritage but is transforming from an insular to a multiethnic society. The process of Somali resettlement in Minneapolis is described in Chapter 2.

London, England is already a global city and is a favorite destination of many Somalis. The Somali community in the UK is the largest and oldest among all European Somali communities because of the history that connects British imperialism to Somalia, as described in Chapter 2. In contrast to Minneapolis, London is the most diverse city in all of Britain, with 40% of its residents belonging to an ethnic minority (Kochan, 2006). “Muslims are the second-largest faith group in London after Christians. Almost 40 per cent of Muslims in England and Wales live in the capital” (Open Society Foundations, 2012, p.19). These two sites can help us better understand what different contexts offer to the construction of sociopolitical life after resettlement as they have significant numbers of the diaspora Somali population.

The Somali populations in Minneapolis and London have developed a unique sense of community as they maintain contact and continued relationships with the diaspora community in many locations as well as with the Somali community back home. This attitude is explained by Werbner (2002) in her discussion of the concept of diaspora. Clearly associated with this concept of diaspora is the idea of transnationalism and transnational social networks (Docker, 2001; Faist, 2010; Vertovec, 2007; Werbner, 2000).

The process of contemporary globalization and technology has further developed these networks, permitting families and friends, scattered as diaspora members across Europe and the United States, to network and reunite. These connections via information and communication technology give members of the Somali Diaspora a forum to share their experiences and

perceptions on their sense of belonging, noting the differences that exist in the societal structures of these two locations.

There is a common identity of being Somali that projects unity when facing other groups of people, but this unity is still fractured from within by clan identity. The clan divisions prior to colonialism did not cause the divisiveness and territorialism that now exists. It was the impact of the colonialism by Britain, Italy, France, Ethiopia, and even the United Nations that changed the way Somalis reflected on, viewed, and utilized clannism. For example, in Britain resources are allocated by ethnic identity, but because the Somali are further divided by clan, their ability to advocate for resources as a single unified group is lacking.

Each diaspora location also presents its unique historical perspective towards successful integration. Britain, which has a history of colonialism in Somalia (Novati, 2009) is currently involved in the state rebuilding of Somalia (Mosley, 2012). Somalis in Britain imagine this to be a sign of their special relationship with their host country. While the United States, with its history of slavery, is fixed on the idea of assimilation, immigration that opened in 1965 to third world countries introduced alternative integration processes (Portes & Zou, 1993). Nevertheless, both Minneapolis and London are sites for Somali community activities and cultural reinvention (Abdi, 2102; Bigalow, 2010; Griffith, 2002; Harris, 2004), even while Somalis face integration obstacles and challenges. In both cities, the Somali community confronts issues of discrimination heightened by the Islamophobia that has been growing in the West since September 11, 2001 (Maxwell, 2006). Muslimness now takes a priority over Somaliness in others' awareness.

These similarities and differences between Minneapolis and London allowed me to make cross-case comparisons and to explore the gender dynamics involved in these diaspora sites.

## **Accessing Minneapolis**

Feldman et al. (2003) and Okumus et al. (2006) suggested that a researcher should consider the format of the research inquiries, determine the scope of the project, and assess the feasibility with great awareness of the context (i.e., location and societal norms) and issues surrounding access, such as whether one is seen as an insider or an outsider. As stated previously, the researcher's familiarity with the participants' cultural practices, values, and languages helps in gathering the relevant information (Ganga & Scott, 2006). These considerations guided the present research, and I utilized my status as an insider-researcher to facilitate the process.

My own situation as a long-term resident of Minneapolis shaped the recruitment of the participants. It is a place where I have built a successful community life in which complex relationships have been created, and I am a member of various nonprofit organizations and volunteer for them in many capacities. As a member of this community, I had a network of existing contacts on which to draw to enable me to gain access to various women's organizations, cultural/religious centers, colleges and universities, and community gathering venues, such as Somali malls. Many community leaders/gatekeepers knew me before I started my research. Thus, in Minneapolis my networks warranted me a reputation of "included insider," someone who won't exploit the trust given by the participants.

Although Somali women reside in many Minneapolis neighborhoods, since 2000 an increased concentration of Somalis have moved to South Minneapolis, particularly the Cedar Riverside and East Phillips neighborhoods (Corn & Domansky, 2009, as cited in Praska, 2012). As a result, South Minneapolis neighborhoods are home to most Somali organizations and accommodate many Somali businesses and shopping malls. The prevalence of Somalis in the

Cedar Riverside neighborhood is so high that the area is known as “Little Mogadishu,” Mogadishu being the capital of Somalia.

The majority of my participants were from the Cedar Riverside neighborhood and other parts of South Minneapolis. One of the oldest and most respected Somali organizations in Minnesota, The Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota (CSCM), is located in Cedar Riverside. CSCM, which helps immigrants with resettlement services and integration, became my first point of contact in Minneapolis and they assisted me in getting access to many participants that reside in the neighborhood. Moreover, they allowed me to use their space for some of the interviews.

Feminist research methods stress that establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewees’ personal experiences and attitudes is an important aspect of the research (Harding, 2004). The Cedar Riverside neighborhood informants were receptive to my conducting interviews at the CSCM, which impressed on me that they found it a nonthreatening environment.

There are many advantages of being an insider researcher; communicating in the participants’ language, understanding the community’s culture, recognizing the formal and informal power structures and building good relationships with gatekeepers all facilitated the research process. Ganga and Scott (2006) recognized that the insider role has duality for the researcher in fieldwork and it becomes more important as another dimension is added: “when research involves social interaction between a migrant researcher and a migrant participant from within the same imagined community” (Ganga & Scott, 2006, p. 1).

Authors continue with the caution that the insider status might also “affect the way in which others perceive us within this relatively close social world” (Ganga & Scott, 2006, p. 1). I



did, in fact, notice that my “included insider” status sometimes affected my participants’ perceptions of me. While this did not affect the outcome of the data collection, there were instances when I sensed that the participants checked whether my views were in line with theirs. By contrast, I noticed that this concern did not come up with the London participants. They recognized me as an “inside-outsider” because I came from Minneapolis. I assume that the Minneapolis participants were more apprehensive about our coresidential community involvement. In Minneapolis, I have many chances to encounter and have other non-research-related engagements with my participants. This may have exacerbated their desire to be viewed as knowledgeable and informed individuals. They initially felt participation might compromise their reputation within their social domain (Ganga & Scott, 2006). In other words, I experienced an aspect of being an insider that “create[d] tension during the research process” (Morusanu, 2015, p.4).

To overcome this challenge, I employed reflexivity (Harding, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007) by emphasizing the dialogic connection between myself and the participants, and I tried to remove the concerns felt by the participants. I demonstrated respect and appreciation for what they were contributing to the research. Additionally, I assured my participants that the aim of this research was to gain information about an area in which little is known—Somali diaspora women and political participation—so they felt they were providing important knowledge. Yet, I was careful not to transfer power over to them. Because I adapted my behavior, this eliminated any power imbalance in the relationship (Harding, 2004), where I, as a researcher, had more power than my participants or my participants had more power than me.

## **Gaining Trust and Acceptability in London: Evoking my Transnational Family**

The second diaspora location, London, is a city I care about because of my transnational family ties across the Atlantic. As is the case for so many other Somalis (Al-Sharmani, 2007), I maintain multistranded transnational ties with Somalia as well as other Western countries where the rest of my family settled, including Britain.

London is also the city where I stayed while I was in school, which gave me an opportunity to reconnect with old friends as well as make new ones. From this experience, I decided to make early contacts for my research. I asked my friends and family to refer me to Somali organizations and community centers that could assist with recruiting informants who had experiences suitable to my research topic and a willingness to participate.

Securing entry into fieldwork is very time consuming (Hesse-Biber, 2007). In this regard, my fieldwork greatly benefitted from my early contacts. When I arrived in London to officially begin my research, I knew whom to call and where to go. My first points of contact were Somali organizations and Islamic community centers located in East and West London that provide services and support to women and families. While there were alternative ways to approach potential informants, I began with community organizations and religious centers because of the public setting. I wanted to explore and understand the Somali British diaspora community outside the home. Thus, participants spoke about political affairs with more confidence and without interruption or comment from family bystanders.

Consequently, upon returning to London, I contacted the leaders of these organizations and faith-based community centers who also served as community gatekeepers. To my surprise, I felt in the beginning that some gatekeepers were defensive toward me. Despite being a Somali

diaspora woman researching the lives of other Somali diaspora women—an insider (Nowicka & Cieslik, 2014; Kusow, 2004)—my motives were questioned. For example, when I went to the organizations and religious community centers to introduce my work, I gained access due to my insider status. But I was reminded that the “insider status is *also* [emphasis added] subject to negotiation between the parties involved in the research” (Nowicka & Cieslik, 2014, p. 6). I had to further negotiate the acceptance of my work by the gatekeepers. This was evident by how often the gatekeepers reminded me that, “London is not Minneapolis,” or by the fact that the gatekeepers introduced me to their members and potential participants as “the researcher from the States.” They frequently remarked that “Somali Minnesotans are considered an influential diaspora community, but the London community is not any less important.”

It is known that gatekeepers are protective and feel responsible for the well-being of their community members (Patton, 2002) and have concern about the researcher’s identity and intentions. Therefore, the gatekeepers’ suspicious attitude was due to their perception of me as someone who lacked the group affiliation that exists in geographically-bounded settings, the connection that Ganga and Scott (2006) characterize as “imagined community” (p. 1). However, this attitude changed shortly thanks to my transnational family ties in London.

One day, I was invited with one of my sisters from London to a community gathering. My sister introduced me to many people there; among the invited were two gatekeepers/community leaders who were helping me with participant recruitment and who did not previously know my family ties. They greeted me in a friendly manner and said, “Why you did not tell us that your sister is from London? We know her. She is a well-respected member of our community.” From that day on, the community leaders’ negative attitude changed, and they became very interested in my research and became supportive. They gave me interviewee

contact information from their networks with other organizations as well as names of professional women. The supportive attitudes of the community leaders positively affected my research, and it encouraged good relations with more participants. Most informants I encountered were willing to discuss the research issues and were able to talk openly about them. Several participants offered to give me tours of Southhall's lively and diverse community where one of the Somali malls is located. Spending time in the Southhall neighborhood with my informants was illuminating, as I had the opportunity to observe them and consider both identity and integration in context, consequently linking their micro/personal behavior to their macro/public behavior. Moreover, I started long-term friendships with some participants. For example, a young participant who was planning her marriage for the following summer invited me to participate in her wedding. Other participants suggested that I move to London as they believed that I could have a successful life and career there.

### **Methods, Sampling, and Data Collection**

My research participants were recruited from the Somali diaspora communities of Minneapolis and London. As a sampling strategy, I first identified organizations, cultural/religious centers, community gathering areas, and colleges and universities with large Somali populations, a process for which my Somali background was helpful. For example, to ensure entry into organizations from which individuals would serve as informants, I approached the organizations where I already knew the leader/gatekeeper. I had good relationship with some of the leaders (those in Minneapolis), as I volunteered in their organizations; others were acquaintances. In London, to save time, I contacted some organizations one year before my fieldwork. The organizations I contacted in Minneapolis and London were:

- Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota (CSCM)

- Somali Women in Minneapolis (SWIM)
- Somali Student Association - Minneapolis
- Somali East London Development Alliances (SELDA)
- Somali Refugee Action Group (SORAG) - London
- Somali Welfare Association - London
- Waltham Forest Somali Women's Association - London

At the beginning, all the leaders I contacted promised to assist me with the recruitment process, but only two were able to fulfill their promises. These were the then Executive Director of the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota (CSCM), a man, and the Executive Director of Waltham Forest Somali Women's Association, a woman. I will detail the recruitment circumstances of each research location later.

Ultimately, some participants were recruited through these two organizations. My encounters and interviews with these participants occurred in organizational settings. Before the official interviews, each leader took time to introduce me to the participants, and during this familiarization passage, I noticed a gender-related element in the leaders' behaviors. The male Executive Director did a minimal-necessary introduction, directed us to the room we used as interview space, and left. In contrast, the female Executive Director had a more welcoming manner with a sort of "hostess" attitude, and seemed at times to be overprotective of the participants. She took time to converse with me and ask more information about my research and life in the States. She offered me tea and generously asked if I needed anything else, or if I had eaten. Before leaving us alone to proceed with the interview, she made sure that the participants still wanted to take part in my study and said, "I am sure that Habon already told you

that you can stop the interview anytime, but I want to make sure you are comfortable in being interviewed at my organization.”

My recruitment was not limited to community organizations, as I sought to recruit potential participants from other venues, such as cultural/religious centers, community gathering areas, and Somali malls. In these sites, I randomly approached women and introduced myself as a graduate student conducting a research study about Somali women and political participation. If they had time and were willing to be interviewed the same day, I found a place to sit and conduct the interview. If their schedule did not permit this, I provided them with my phone number and asked them to contact me so we could schedule an interview.

Informal networks were crucial to the success of my research. Many interviewees, especially students, were referrals from relatives and friends. Sometimes, after they had finished the interview, the participants themselves would offer to provide me the contact information of other women for an interview.

From the above description, it is apparent that my recruitment method relied on traditional Somali ethnic routes. Scholars share that, in order to prevent ethnic bias, the sampling strategy should not rely solely on community of origin (Morosanu, 2015; Nowicka & Ryan, 2015), and if possible, researchers should avoid selecting a community only in order to “find or prove community” (Brettell, 2003, p. 109). I recognize the limitations of my recruitment method. Community-based associations as sampling sites are important because of the services they provide to their ethnic members, but the relationships that the associations foster with other entities and institutions that are not necessarily ethnic highlight the importance of the nonethnic alternative. In prioritizing traditional ethnic routes, I neglected other equally important

nonethnic recruitment routes such as universities and English as a Second Language (ESL) community services, which could allow me to reach a more diverse collection of women.

### **Participant Profiles**

Forty women in total, 20 from Minneapolis and 20 from London, participated and were interviewed in the study. I agree that “[a]n appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). My sample answered the study’s questions. The respondents’ ages ranged between 24-65 years and they came from diverse social strata. I interviewed professionals, students, small business owners, and stay-at-home moms. These participants’ characteristics fairly reflect those of other Somali women in Minneapolis and London.

The information in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 is useful for developing an understanding regarding the correlation between the interviewees’ ages, attained levels of education, their involvement in politics, the form of political participation, and their social networks. The respondents’ names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The participants had the potential to be grouped into two different generations based on their upbringing: first generation and 1.5 generation. Tables 1 and 2 present the breakdown of the first generation participants by country, age, occupation, marital status, and number of children.

Table 1

*First Generation Respondents' Demographic Profile – Minneapolis*

Participant	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Children
Ambaro	57-60	Mother	Married	4
Arwa	60-65	Retired	Divorced	5
Basra	47	Community Coordinator	Married	2
Dahabo	54-58	Retired	Divorced	3
Daleys	58-62	Grandmother	Divorced	5
Halimo	50-54	Mother	Married/not living with husband	2
Jawahir	57	Business owner	Married	4
Qaali	58-60	Entrepreneur	Divorced	5
Raxo	60-63	Business owner	Married but not living with husband	None
Shacni	55-57	Business owner	Married but not living with husband	5



Table 2 shows many of the first-generation respondents' ages in a range because they chose to not provide their actual age. However, because almost all of them talked about aspects of their premigration lifestyles and status, I was able to gather adequate information respective to their age, employment, and class background. Many of them, when asked their occupation, simply stated, "mother."

Table 2

*First Generation Respondents' Demographic Profile- London*

Participant	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Children
Amran	54-60	Mother	Married/not living with husband	6
Ardo	56-60	Mother	Married/ not living with husband	2
Cadar	55-60	Mother	Married	2
Dahira	54-58	Retired	Divorced	2
Fadumo	56	Business owner	Divorced	2
Jamilah	52-54	Business owner	Married/not living with husband	4
Muhubo	56-65	Mother	Married not living with husband	4
Ruqiyo	58-60	Mother	Married	5
Suada	48	Unemployed	Divorced	3
Zaynab	55	Mother /student	Married	6

The first generation grew up in a homogenized culture in Somalia. They shared that they left the country either just before or just after the civil war. Their self-identity is rooted in their home country. Some, in order to hold onto the respect they had back home, consider themselves “invited guests” in their new countries. They claim to have only a temporary presence in Minneapolis or London. Thus, common to this cohort’s narrative is nostalgia and yearning to return to native soil. This is evident in how diasporic subjects reconstruct the homeland image with respect to the societies of resettlement. The host country is viewed as a space of repression, anguish, and lack of social status. Instead, Somalia is remembered as “the good life,” where dignity, honor, and elevated social rank existed. However, this Somalia no longer exists.

The second cohort of younger respondents comprises those who arrived in their new countries as children and fit into the 1.5 generation category (Rumbaut, 2004). Tables 3 and 4 present the breakdown of the 1.5 generation participants by country, age, occupation, marital status, and number of children.

Table 3

*1.5 Generation Respondents' Demographic Profile - Minneapolis*

Participant	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Children
Beydan	27	Activist	Single	None
Carawelo	28	Student	Single	None
Ilhan	29	Supervisor Public sector	Married	1
Jihan	26	Professional	Divorced	2
Mulki	25	Student	Single	None
Nimco	32	Professional	Married	Expecting
Riwan	27	Unemployed	Married	1
Saxarla	30	Business owner	Married	1
Suban	26	Stayed home mon/activist	Married	None
Warsan	24	Student	Engaged	None

Table 4

*1.5 Generation Respondents' Demographic Profile –London*

Participant	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Children
Amanaa	28	Activist	Divorced	None
Aliyaa	26	Student/Part-time employer	Married	1
Asiya	24	Activist	Divorces	None
Deqa	27	Nurse	Single	None
Ifrah	26	Unemployed	Single	None
Ilwad	31	Professional	Engaged	None
Samiya	25	Student	Single	None
Shamso	32	Teacher	Engaged	None
Surer	25	Par-time employer	Married	1
Zulekha	29	Business owner	Single	None

The younger generation respondents' multiple identities challenge ethnic boundaries. As I shall discuss in Chapters 8, many 1.5 generation respondents foster feelings of solidarity with various categories of people, in various countries. To prevent biases related to the convenience of ethnic or diasporic homogenization, which can lead to groupist assumptions (Brubaker, 2005; Nowicka & Ryan, 2015). In this study, when I describe the first and 1.5 generation respondents as a "cohort" or "group," my intention is not to homogenize all first generation respondents and 1.5 generation respondents but to emphasize the generational differences of the respondents and their viewpoints.

### **Methodological Considerations for Research with Diaspora Participants**

In recruiting informants and conducting the interviews, I conformed to the required conduct of postgraduate doctoral research for the University of Sussex. However, I agree with Lu and Gatua (2014) that using research protocols that have a one-size-fits-all quality may not be well suited for everyone, and there exists the need for a research methodology that takes diversity into consideration. They stated that the "commonly adopted research procedures, such as the informed consent process, may be culturally inappropriate for research with culturally diverse populations, and hence require cultural adaptations" (Lu & Gatua, 2014, p. 1).

The data collection process of my study took longer than I expected because some of the potential informants first contacted were hesitant to sign the consent form. Even after explaining to them in Somali that the aim of the document is to protect and give them the opportunity to make informed decisions about their participation in the research, they still wanted to participate, but without signing the informed consent form. They perceived the consent form as a liability in that it contained their actual name. For that reason, I had to continue to look for other participants who would sign the document, so I was compliant with the ethical practices of

postdoctoral research required by my university. Others refused to have their interview taped, so I took notes. Most who refused to sign the consent document or have their interview taped were first generation diaspora members. Cultural and contextual factors influenced the reaction of those potential informants to the consent form and the audiotape record. The lack of trust arose from both past and present experiences, as well as the strange request to sign a permission document when they already agree to share their life story.

It is important to consider that Somalia experienced a very oppressive dictatorship (Samatar, 2007) and that it is expected that immigrants from a brutal dictatorship, where the regime spied upon and intimidated its citizens, would be resistant to signing a consent document and having their interview taped for research purposes. Many of the first generation members have, for most of their adulthood, dealt with a government that wiretapped and scrutinized their lives.

In addition, the War on Terror and its Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act ratified in 2001 by President George W. Bush (Cole & Lederman, 2006) provided Muslims with another reason to be suspicious. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) stated that there is a developing sense of paranoia among Muslims about surveillance, signing documents, and having their conversations taped (ISPU, 2004).

The ISPU's argument merits mention here because their account held true in relation to my own research experiences. One day, I was interviewing Shacni, a business owner, in one of the Minneapolis Somali malls. Shacni's business partner walked into the room where I was interviewing, and when she realized that I was recording the interview, she asked Shacni to step out with her. After few minutes, Shacni came back and told me that her business partner was

concerned for her gullibility in accepting that the interview would be recorded. She feared that I could be an FBI agent. Shacni chose to disregard her partner's behavior and to continue with the interview. She also asserted that because of the PATRIOT Act, many Somalis have developed a distrustful attitude toward individuals who go around shopping malls and other community gathering places with tape recorders or other devices that could encroach on their privacy.

The fact that Somalis are from a culture of oral tradition (Ali, 2015; Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009) and are now in a Western environment that demands researchers obtain documentation granting their prior permission complicates the informed consent process. As one potential informant explained in justification of her refusal to sign, Somalis are more than willing to share their life experience and disclose their story, which, in the eyes of first generation members, implies tacit consent that the story is now out for retelling; therefore, requesting they sign a document that allows the researcher to use their responses for my research blurs the demarcation between narrative storytelling and probing interrogation that they believe may become a liability.

Aware of these cultural considerations, I sought a different means of overcoming the problem. I used my cultural competency (Lu & Gatua, 2014), emphasizing to potential interviewees my understanding of the differences between the Somali cultural code, *Afkeena waa isku amano* (when people speak confidentially and the matter discussed remains private) and *shakesi* (common conversational narrative that may be repeated publicly). I restated it was a school requirement that I obtain their signature, and that I would not be able to utilize their interview narrative without one. With that information, some reconsidered their decision and signed the consent form. For those who still had doubt, I did not insist and did not use them as subjects.

Although these issues did not limit my research because of the large number of Somalis from which I could recruit, I speculate that in another circumstance, this refusal to sign could present difficulties. This requirement of a consent form is based on Western cultural norms and could lead to dilemmas in research recruitment limiting participants who match the proposed study criteria. Thus, it would prove helpful to allow the researcher other avenues that are more in line with the cultural norms of their non-Western subjects.

### **Interviews**

The method employed in data collection was interviewing. Qualitative research has employed the semistructured interview as its principal format (Patton, 2002), so I opted to use semistructured interviews for my study. The semistructured interview was the most congruent approach with my research goals because it is a flexible, yet controllable method consistent with feminist ethnography. This approach allowed me some control in the preparation of the list of questions and oversight as I “owned” the questions (Barbour, 2008, p. 120). At the same time, the approach gave the participants certain autonomy to answer the questions the way they liked and to withhold information or refuse to answer one or more questions. Because the research questions were open-ended, the participants had the freedom to fully share ideas, thoughts and experiences. I framed my questions on intersectionality and invited my respondents to share their political attitudes, identities, and experiences however it best resonated with them. This allowed me to respect my respondents’ self-identification and to review intersections that I may have discounted (Hilldburg, 2013).

I approached the participants in such a way that trust could be established. In order to build this trust and create a relaxed atmosphere, I accommodated the participants' choices of location, time, and date. Furthermore, I asked the participants to select a quiet and private



location without interferences and interruptions. For that reason, the interviews were carried out in three different locations: the homes of the participants, coffee shops, and community centers. I also gave consideration to my constraints, staying mindful of my need to complete my research on schedule.

I conducted face-to-face interviews because this method best captures all relevant data (Hammersley, 2007). Because ambiguity and contradictory accounts are not uncommon in qualitative research (Kvale, 2007), this method allowed me to address any concerns or questions that came up during the interview.

The purpose of a research interview is to gather specific information, and the researcher must guide the interviewee in order to see how well the subject understands and relates to the dissertation themes. I started by asking my participants some general background questions. After this, I began the research interview. Among the questions I asked were:

How old are you?

What is your occupation?

How long you have lived in Minneapolis/London?

How do you identify yourself in Minneapolis/London? (When I asked this question of first generation participants in the Somali language, I needed to clarify with several questions, because in Somali, they would always respond to this questions by identifying one's clan affiliation. When I asked this question in English of the 1.5 generation, I did not need to follow-up with any questions, as clan was not mentioned).

Do you participate in politics in Minneapolis/London?

What forms of political participation do you practice?

What was your pre-migration political experience? (Asked of first generation respondents only). A sample of interview schedule is in Appendix B).

The objective of qualitative research is to get balanced interview data, understand people's behavior, the context in which it happens, and the values that people assign to particular situations; consequently, language is important. "Language is not a neutral medium, therefore, but can define difference and commonality, exclude and include others" (Filep, 2009, p. 60). The sample of respondents included women who could not communicate fully in English. Because I wanted to incorporate these women's perspectives in my study, I knew that I had to interview them in Somali. Though I speak Somali, I did not want to give rise to paternalistic research practices, wherein a researcher decides for them which language to use or, worse, appear as someone pointing out their language deficiency. To handle this delicate matter, I deferred to the respondents and asked which language they would like me to use. Seven first generation respondents were actually surprised that I asked such a question because they took it for granted that I would use Somali during the interview. Then they said, "of course, our mother tongue." I anticipated their answer because, for some first generation respondents, the Somali language serves as an identity marker. At their request, I conducted the interview using Somali. I did not have any problems translating Somali interviews into English. The first generation respondents, whether interviewed in English or Somali, provided similar views.

On the other hand, the 1.5 generation preferred I interview them in English, because they regarded themselves more fluent in English than Somali. This also served to highlight their multiple identity. Clearly, they could have used Somali as they spoke it at home, but they were more comfortable using the language they used in their daily lives.

Most of the interviews were tape recorded with the respondents' permission; however, some refused to be recorded. In these cases, I took notes as they answered the research questions and recorded comments that seemed uniquely interesting. An average interview lasted 40 minutes, but several lasted more than 60 minutes.

### **Data Analysis and Intersectionality Approach**

The task of the researcher in the data analysis process is to convert raw data “into a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis”(Gibbs, 2008, p. 1). One important activity regarding the practicality of intersectional qualitative analysis is having awareness about intersectional identities, as these influence political participation (Brown, 2014).

As stated before in this study, diaspora women from Somalia are a minority by virtue of their African background and Muslim religion. Due to Africa's colonial history, emphasizing that diaspora women are from an African country, makes explicit the “othering” and, thus, the marginalization of these women in their Western environment. Exclusion prompted discussions among the subgroup on what they can do to fit in and bring harmony to racialized surroundings as well as command engagement in anti-discriminatory practices. Moreover, it compelled my study of Islamic, postcolonial, and transnational research within the feminist literature, in the tradition of Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Mohanty (1988), Narayan (1998), and Spivak (1988). Analyzing the research within these feminist approaches is critical in my aim to reveal the intersectionality of multiple oppressions and its manifestation in the lives of the participants.

The purpose of intersectionality analyses is to move beyond single- or typically-favored categories of analysis and examine the intersecting axis between different power structures and the manner in which people are simultaneously positioned or position themselves in various categories, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity (Christensen & Jensen, 2012;

Collins, 1990; McCall, 2001). The approach highlights a nonadditive principle, which means different social categories mutually exist as forms of social differentiation that must be wholly dealt with, despite the directed attack by the systems of domination (McCall, 2005).

An intersectionality approach enhances social sciences research, but it also introduced new methodological conundrums as singular academic disciplines produce focused and limited data and thus offer different political applications. When prioritizing a single field/methodology and claiming it as intersectionality methodology; new inequalities and a hierarchy of differences are created as the research process highlights one oppression over another (Hillsburg, 2013). Moreover, while intersectional theory advances non-additive principles, this does not always translate easily in practice as “conversations between research participants and researchers are often guided by questions that are implicitly additive” (p.6). Another complication lies in the methods used to address identity categories themselves because “all social categories can be fractured into even smaller groupings, resulting in a paralysis of sorts as axis of analysis multiply” (Hillsburg, 2013, p. 6). Hillsburg (2013) identified three guidelines for intersectional study: The researcher should (a) avoid policing of identity categories, (b) not forget that identity categories are fluid, and (c) not disregard the vulnerability of others (p. 7).

In this study, I followed Hillsburg’s axioms in the interview and data analysis. After transcribing the tapes, I translated the interviews I conducted in Somali into English without difficulty. Translation in qualitative research is more than changing words from one language into another; it involves the understanding of certain features and characteristics of the culture, so that the meaning of important expressions and concepts isn’t “lost in translation” (Filep, 2009, p. 60). I am well-versed in Somali culture and language, so I believe I ethically translated my respondents’ answers and narratives in ways that represent their views.

I have read through the interviews several times to attain a sense of the whole and examined different patterns and variations among the respondents. Then research text was separated by generation and location. Second, I identified the text's major content categories. Finally, I sorted the content categories into themes within each generation and location around the dissertation questions: What type of social capital and social network resources they used for political purposes; what type of political participation they employed (note: models of participation were separated into voting, traditional forms of activity, and nontraditional group-based political activities); how they related to Somali diasporas and the question of homeland belonging; what motivated their political participation; and experiences they had in which they felt marginalized or oppressed.

Because the aim of my research is to recount the experience of Somali diaspora women, gender plays an important role in my study. The questions I asked probed gender positions in political participation, yet, in the analysis I was careful about my respondents' self-identification. I paid attention to identity, equality and power. I focused my inquiry on points of intersection, complexity, dynamic processes, and the structures that explain access to rights and opportunities, rather than on reactions to the effects of a single defined identity such as Black or Muslim. I considered that identity categories are not fixed and that depending upon the circumstances my respondents "might deploy identities strategically" (Hillsburg, 2013, p. 8). I delineated the particularity of the identity markers that formed the basis of examination.

Lastly, I was mindful of the danger of pitting marginalized identities against each other. In my questions and analysis, I avoided depoliticizing one identity while politicizing another and gave voice to all social and political identities that my respondents reported in connection with their political participation.

## **Positioning the Research with Intersubjectivity and Reflexivity**

In order for the researcher to disclose the experiences of the participants, it is important that significant reciprocal rapport is developed between the two parties (De Vault, 1999; Feldman et al., 2003). Thus, considering the fact that I am originally from Somalia and undertook research among Somali diaspora women, I integrated reflexivity as is characterized in ethnographic approaches. However, in designing my research, I was concerned with the possibility that my unique diaspora experience could complicate the complex power structures of representation and field research (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Harding, 2004).

The difference between my experience and the experience of the interviewees is that prior to the civil war, I left Somalia to pursue higher education and lived in Italy for a considerable time before moving to the US as a part of the diaspora. Most of my research participants settled as diaspora subjects in Minneapolis and London after the civil war erupted in Somalia. More importantly, I did not experience the civil war and refugee trauma that my participants suffered. In order to negotiate my double identity (i.e., refugee now, but not at first) in the fieldwork, I opted to move toward a dialogical interaction with the participants, where reflexivity as intersubjective reflection played a central role.

The reflexivity approach to research includes reflecting upon one's viewpoint and values during the research and finding balance between the beliefs we hold and the beliefs of others (Bolton, 2009). Practicing reflexivity enabled me to reflect on my personal views and values, both as a researcher and as a member of the Somali diaspora community. I studied both the researched group and the interplay of my dual nature's effect on my research. This helped me to take into consideration contexts, events, and emotions.

Reflexivity is critical to the character of a feminist approach because it leads to the self-awareness common in those involved with the advancement of gender equality (Fonow & Cook, 1991). England (1994) maintained that the reflexive approach allows the researcher to be more receptive to any ideas contradicting their theoretical position that may surface from the fieldwork. In opting not to highlight my personal story, my subjective diaspora experience did not affect the research process. Instead, I focused on the participants' experiences and stories as well as intersubjective experience. The intersubjective nature of community life is central, as it indicates that the researcher and the participants have shared experience and that they should look for methods to develop this advantage (England, 1994; Feldman et al., 2003, Ganga & Scott, 2006).

This intersubjective approach can also create issues, as I explained in the section about gaining access to respondents. I considered the dilemma that emerged within the research relationship as I sought not only to understand the participants' experiences but also my own experiences and how they influenced the research process. I explicitly situated myself within the research through my method of interviewing and restructured the power balances (Harding, 2004) between the participants and myself. In the interview setting, I appeared as similar as possible to the interviewees so as not to be viewed by the participants as a professional with undue authority, influence, and an ulterior motive (see the interview section about respondents' language disadvantage), who would automatically be mistrusted. I was straightforward with disclosing the purpose of my research. To avoid seeming completely out of place, I always dressed modestly and conservatively. Even though I was fully engaged in reflexive analysis, I managed to hold back from influencing the interviewees' ideas and answers. I was aware of my personal opinion and also my interests as a researcher and guarded the objectivity, integrity, and

trustworthiness of the study. Lastly, I chose the most optimal way to pose the research questions to those respondents who did not have the depth of understanding/experience that I do about the research topic, for example, being much more conversational with the first generation informants.

I recruited potential participants from ethnic routes. These routes were convenient, as I was able to gain trust and interviewed women from different backgrounds such as age, marriage status, education, and employment which permitted me to uncover unique activism and engagement. What I learned while interviewing the respondents was not anticipated. Yet, I admit that my focus on Somali community organizations and mosques might have limited my opportunity to observe my respondents and their social ties outside of these structures. Moreover, in placing a special emphasis on the role of mosques as community centers and consequently my use of Islamic feminism theory to explain that Islam does not mandate injustice, I may have put forth the idea that I could not capture their views and voices through other feminist theories. Thus, a concern of my study was possible ways to avoid ethnoreligious bias without neglecting it altogether. As a strategy to tackle this concern, I used postcolonial and transnational feminist theory in addition to Islamic feminism theory. I also recognized and discussed the importance of nonethnic ties in which the young generation engage.

### **Clan: An Uncomfortable Discussion**

As an insider, I was mindful that I was going to the research field laden with traditional cultural baggage and, as such, the perceptions, reaction, and responses that respondents have of me was not entirely under my control. Cultural baggage can, of course, be both positive and negative. It was positive in that I was able to gain access to the selected research subjects and negative in that if my clan affiliation was revealed it could impact subjects' responses.



I have personal knowledge of Somali clan dynamic and clannism. As explained in Chapter 2, clan is an inscribed identity inherited from patriarchal ancestors, whereas clannism is a political ideology. Clan dynamics are a sensitive issue for Somali scholars who research the Somali diaspora communities and in some cases, avoid discussions on clan affiliations in their research.

Kusow (2004), in talking about cultural baggage and the dilemma faced by being an insider/outsider researcher, noted that clan dynamics was relevant to investigate during his PhD study of the Canadian Somali diaspora community. Yet, as an insider researcher, he experienced discomfort because for him discussion of clan was too sensitive a topic. Therefore, he chose not to include it.

In her book *Elusive Jannah*, Abdi (2015) stated that clan was not relevant to her study but she felt she had to address and clarify her stance on the issue:

I grew up in an era where asking others their clan was frowned. This remains so for many in my age group and especially for many in the Somali communities in the diaspora. But the places of clan and what it means in the society has certainly become a major political topics since the collapse of the Somali nation in 1991. Nevertheless, the only Somalis who ever inquired about my clan affiliation were men and women in their sixties and seventies. (p. 24)

Within Somali diaspora studies, clan is a topic that often causes discomfort for both the interviewer and the interviewee. I prepared myself for respondents' perceptions of the worth of the clan and clannism and the fact that this may create trust issues and influence how willing they would be to share information or their story. My plan was to let the respondents know that if a clan related question caused discomfort, they had the option to not answer the question. I was also prepared to deal with questions about my clan membership. Ultimately, I did not have to use my plan because almost all respondents distanced themselves from discussing clan affiliation. According to them, clannism is the reason Somalia collapsed; thus, they wanted to

focus on elements that unite Somalis such as Somaliness and Muslimness. Detail about this will be discussed in the empirical chapters.

Therefore, in no interaction in Minneapolis and London did a respondent raise my clan affiliation as an issue. This is not to say that some first generation respondents were not curious about my clan membership. I know that because they used a discursive strategy that is common with people who want to find out someone's clan.

Certain clans give their children a recognizable name, and thus someone's name can easily give away their clan identity. In all other cases, if someone is interested in finding out someone's clan affiliation, they will either ask directly or use discourse strategy and indirectly ask questions related to the city or region of the person's childhood. Because my name did not give away my clan, a few respondents asked me the city and region where I grew up. In both cases I told participants that I grew up in Mogadishu and this seemed to satisfy their curiosity.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this chapter was to outline and explain the methods I employed in the realization of this research, along with the major methodological choices I made to understand the process of political participation Somali Muslim diaspora women. I also explained the factors that made Minneapolis and London especially valid choices for such research.

My study argues that social identities and inequality are interdependent for subjects like my respondents, and as a result, I chose intersectionality methodology as my analysis tool. In this chapter, I briefly addressed that issues regarding the practice of intersectional research are not simple (Hillsburg, 2013) and that the concept of intersectionality has introduced new methodological problems. In light of this, Hillsburg suggested that the most substantial

instrument in the intersectionality researcher's methodological toolbox is to avoid developing a hierarchy in the identities studied.

I also discussed the limitations of my choice to recruit my participants through ethnic routes and community sites. I questioned the insider/outsider dichotomy as a framework for understanding researcher-researched relationship. I claim that it is important to reconsider the oversimplified binary construct of insider/outside and remember that insiderness/outsiderness is dynamic and complex. It is important to reflect on the self-identification of the participants and how this affects our experiences in gaining access to the research field. Immigrants and diaspora members use hyphenated identity such as Somali-American or Somali-British. In doing so, they affirm that the combination of two identities forms a multiple identity. At the same time, they imply a distinct identity that distinguishes themselves from those who don't carry the same hyphen. Some researchers with migration backgrounds engage their work within this "co-ethnic paradox." They recognize that there is difference to be researched in groups with the same ethnicity. I found that the comparative research lay in the aspect of their locality and its contribution to the differences in their identities. Often this important aspect is neglected and the assumption is made that ethnic communities are static and homogeneous. As my experience demonstrates, the perceived proximity ethnic/diaspora researchers share with their research participants is not straightforward and other important factors must be taken into account. This observation echoes Glick-Schiller (2008), Morosanu, (2013), and Nowicka and Cieslik (2014) that the bias of "methodological ethnicity" leads to oversight of the influence of other factors like locality that shape migrant experiences. The experience prepared me to be conscious of my own biases during the interviews and data analysis.

The chapter explained situational and dynamic ethical questions and requirements that emerged throughout the data collection process. I deemed that such questions are insufficiently addressed through the ethical standards and guidelines of universities, research councils, and professional bodies.

## Chapter 5: The Role of Social Capital in Somali Diaspora Women's Political Participation

### **The Institutionalization of Islam in Britain and the United States**

An important aspect of reviewing the institutionalization of Islam in Britain and the United States is to understand how the mosques function differently in the host country than they did in Somalia, where their purpose was solely as a house of worship. Studies of Islam and the organizational approaches of Muslim communities show that the institutionalization of Islam has manifested differently in different countries. These differences result from different policies, cultures, and histories, as well as the characteristics of the Muslim communities and their organizational plans (Rath et al., 1999). I will not discuss immigrant integration policies in Britain and the United States here in detail; rather, I will focus on the challenges Muslims have experienced in the formation of Islamic institutions. Respondents from Minneapolis face challenges and concerns in the institutionalization of Islam that have been handled years ago in the Muslim communities of Britain, as well as in the larger cities of America, such as New York.

Setting up mosques and other religious institutions is a crucial step in the cultural, structural, and political integration of immigrant communities into their new countries. Vertovec (2000) asserted that the representative institutions directly produced through the agency of diaspora communities are usually religious. Islam is a key marker for Muslim community identity, and the mosque is the reflection of the social position of Islam and the Muslim communities within their respective host societies.

Within Western society, Muslims have come a long way in positioning their identity in their host countries. When Muslims immigrated to Western Europe and the United States, they considered themselves to be temporary dwellers rather than permanent residents, so they did not place importance on having Islamic institutions (Ansari, 2002; Haddad & Smith, 1996). This

was particularly true for the guest workers who came “from former or current colonies to supplement the drained work force in European countries” and who never imagined settling in Europe, as they anticipated returning to the homeland (Marranci, 2008, p. 55). Over time, this changed, and once guest workers had established themselves in their destination countries, they sent for their families and relatives to join them. This has necessitated that religious and ethnic institutions be developed to fulfill the social and spiritual needs of growing immigrant communities and to allow those communities’ populations to remain embedded in Muslim values (Beck, 2002).

Noting the obstacles that Muslims in Europe have overcome in establishing their religious institutions, Rath et al. (1999) stated:

At first Islam led a rather concealed existence, but it has gradually developed into an important mobilizing power among immigrants in Europe and [the] United States. Muslims have pressed for the establishing of institutions to enable them to practice their religion. They have organized in many ways and established institutions varying from mosques, halâl butchers, schools, broadcasting organizations, and political parties right through the cemeteries, and have worked for the appointments of Islam spiritual advisers in hospitals, prisons, the armed forces and the like. Slowly but surely the outlines of Islamic communities, assuming that such things exist, have begun to emerge through Western Europe. (p. 53)

Muslims have dedicated more efforts and resources to the creation of mosques and Islamic centers than perhaps any other institution, because mosques and Islamic centers are markers of the Muslim presence in the United States and Western Europe (Ansari, 2002; Haddad & Smith, 1996).

After 1965, when the first large-scale influx of Muslims from various countries came to the United States, mosques began to be developed in Muslim communities as houses of worship and community centers. According to the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR, 2006), although religious discrimination is still a reality in the United States, the American Muslim

community has seen a remarkable growth in the last several decades. Today, there are thousands of mosques and Muslim organizations of all types and purposes.

Mosques in the United States and Britain fulfill two important functions: They provide religious services for the Muslim community, and they create social networks based on a common ethnic and religious identity. Because of the rising anti-Islam sentiment in Britain and the United States, forming Islamic institutions is particularly important to help challenge discrimination, encourage and facilitate participation, make public claims on behalf of the immigrant community, and demand full acceptance as members of society. Mosques and Islamic centers also provide members of the Muslim community with access to resources and opportunities that they might not otherwise have in their host countries.

### **Impact of Religious Institution Involvement on the Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities**

Indeed, religious institutions and religious attendance matter in the formation of citizens' political lives. Jamal (2005) investigated the political influence of American mosques and revealed that, despite the fact that Muslims are not a homogenous community, mosques play the same role of churches in increasing levels of civic and political involvement by enhancing psychological resources, such as group consciousness.

Eggert and Giugni's (2011) research on the differences in the influence of place of worship, attendance, and religious activism among Christian and Muslim immigrants across Europe found that association with faith-based groups has a positive effect on electoral and nonelectoral participation, particularly for Muslims. According to the authors, this contrast might be the result of the disposition of Christian organizations to operate more in the private

than in the public domain, which is the opposite for Muslim associations, which focus on the public sphere.

In Britain, Sobolewska et al. (2015) examined the impact of religious attendance on political participation among some religion/ethnic minorities (Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Ethnic minority Christians) and learned that political mobilization and politics are distinctly salient to religions; however, Muslim worshipers who regularly go to religious services and activities have greater propensity for political participation. Authors suggest that religious attendance has a significant correspondence with higher political participation because religious institutions mediate “the acquisition of political resources through attendance and direct political mobilisation from the places of worship” (Sobolewska et al., 2015, p.273). By participating in religious institutions, individuals build social relationships and access social resources that they otherwise would be lacking due to their minority status. Regular attendance in religious activities encourages relevant psychological resources such as political trust, political efficacy, and racial consciousness. Sobolewska and colleagues (2015) claimed that besides the religious institutions’ mediating mechanism, there may be “moderating mechanisms that may alter the relationship between attendance and political participation” (p. 252). They pointed out that when religious institutions are politicized, they are more successful in raising the levels of mediating psychological resources, especially a sense of group racial consciousness. Possible causes for the success of the religious institutions might be related to the “co-ethnic composition of the place of worship and the resulting ethnic social capital; or it could arise as a consequence of places of worship articulating or promoting politicized identities arising from histories of ethno-religious struggle or shared ethno-religious grievances” (Sobolewska et al., 2015, p. 273).



My study lends support to Sobolewska et al.'s (2015) assertion, and I demonstrate that, for my respondents, the mosque fosters political participation because of the resulting ethnic social capital and contributes to Somali Muslims being politicized, particularly in Minneapolis. For them, the mosques "act as vehicles for the articulation and expression of political concerns and hence stimulate political participation among attendees" (Sobolewska et al., 2015, p. 254).

### **Religious Institutions' Role in Immigrant Women's Political Participation**

Although the influence of religious institutions on the political participation of ethnic minorities has been the subject of a considerable number of studies, with the exception of Read (2007), scholarly attention to the influence of formal organizations on immigrant women's political participation pays little attention to the ways religious organizations influence immigrant women's political development in the United States and Britain.

Read (2007) recognized the importance of religious organizations in increasing political awareness. However, in her research on Arab Muslim women's political participation in the United States, she found that mosque attendance diminishes rather than encourages political activity. According to her, this is due to the "fact that the most highly religious women are also the most gender traditional and may feel that the political arena should be left to men" (Read, 2007, p. 1088). Contrary to Read, I demonstrate that attendance in religious organizations and mosques is a bridge and not a barrier to the political activism of the first-generation women of my study.

Because of the civil war and clan divisiveness, Somalis turned to religion in an attempt to define their community. Religious behavior was revitalized, and in the diaspora context this trend has been further reinforced because of the uncertainty that comes with the new territories. Researchers have pointed out that religion plays an important role in the life of newcomers

because it offers communal spaces for articulating cultural differences and provides a familiar experience that reminds immigrants of their homes (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Warner, 1993; Warner & Witter, 1998).

In Minneapolis and London, religion informs many aspects of the lives of the Somali immigrants. For many, religion now has a functional meaning; that is, they interpret events and experiences by connecting them with a higher sense of order. For women in particular, this dynamic is paramount in that it allows them to develop a more articulated and creative form of agency. For them, the Quran is the primary tool with which to bargain power and confront misconstruction of gender roles, both in their private and public lives. This agency is not deconstructing the traditional gender norms, but rather it gives a new signification to gender norms by highlighting the mutual dependency and complementary roles of females and males. This new agency and empowerment have been possible because of their study of the Quran and interpreting it from the women's perspective.

Women attend mosque events and volunteer in various capacities, and they also participate in community mobilization efforts aimed at the Somali and other Muslim communities. This has allowed women to learn more about local politics and policies that affect them. It also gives the respondents the opportunity to deconstruct gender and Islamic discourses that have been hindering the acceptance of their community by the larger segment of society, thus contradicting Read (2007), as their involvement in mosque activities leads to political networking. I explore the networks of Somali ethnic mosques in London below.

### **Social Bonding in the Somali Mosques: London Respondents**

The formation of ethnic-oriented mosques may reflect the growing Muslim communities in London. According to the Muslim Council of Britain's data, Islam is the fastest growing

religion in the UK. The Muslim population in England and Wales increased from “1.55 million in 2001 to 2.71 million in 2011 “(Muslim Council of Britain, 2015).

This population of Muslims is not homogeneous, but comes from different countries and of various ethnicities. The Muslim Council of Britain reported that Muslims are “68% Asian (1.83 million of 2.71 million) and 32% non-Asian,” while “1 in 12 is of White ethnicity (8% of the Muslim population)” (The Muslim Council of Britain, 2015, p. 16). This ethnic diversity creates competition for resources and space.

McAndrew and Sobolewska (2014) reported that “mosques are anecdotally considered to [be] largely ethnically segregated and more recent migrants from Africa might have . . . [found] it harder to access mosques than those from larger-established communities” (p. 59). Some of the respondents shared this and suggested that despite the Islamic belief advocating the equality of all Muslims, ethnic tensions exist in mosques.

London respondents confided that in earlier years when they moved to London they attended mosques that attracted a majority of families with South Asian backgrounds, and they were unaware of the informal rules of the mosque managements in London. That is, the community which formed the mosque wields considerable authority and control, especially in directing devotional and educational activities. As a result, respondents felt out of place in the South Asian mosques because the sermon was done mostly in a South Asian language and translated into English, neither of which were understood by the respondents, and activities were tailored for South Asian communities. The mosques also lacked the familiar Somali intermingling of social and religious connections. Above all, respondents did not appreciate that members of these mosques were annoyed by the Somali women’s habit of attending the mosques without male relatives. These are among the reasons that the Somali community started forming

and revitalizing their own mosques and Islamic cultural centers. These same respondents implied they were impressed by the level of respect for cultural traditions and rules that existed in the South Asian communities' mosques and deemed this as the reason these communities were successful.

Many respondents viewed Asian mosques as having strong social capital. This strong social bonding not only engenders high levels of mutual obligations and cooperation but also provides effective sanctions to encourage members to adhere to group norms. Dahira commented: "We need to work hard so our mosques can have strong rules and authority so we will become a thriving and respectable community that has a public voice like that of the Pakistani and Indian communities." Dahira's desire was that mosques and religious leaders would reestablish the Somali Islamic values because there is a cultural crisis and spiritual deprivation, particularly among the younger generation, which, according to her, display less respect toward the elderly and have adopted individualistic and egocentric attitudes. Fadumo said, "We want an Imam that teaches discipline and instills the Islamic faith and respect for the elderly. Other Muslims see us as lost and without community rule and authority." Other respondents mentioned that the mosques are tasked with transmitting faith tradition from one generation to the next with a sound teaching of hierarchical structures. As I referenced before, London respondents were against the narrative of Somalis being an abstract entity that is addressed in a demeaning or patronizing way by many in London, particularly the media.

All ten respondents acknowledged attending Somali mosques. This study defines a Somali ethnic mosque as having three characteristics: the Imam and majority of the leaders are Somalis, the khudba (sermon) is translated into Somali, and most of the attendees are Somali. The Somali mosques and Islamic centers that the respondents asserted attending at the time of

the interview were the Al-Huda Cultural Centre and Mosque, the Attaqwa Mosque located in East London, and the Quba Masjid and Education Centre and Darussalam Masjid and Community Centre located in West London. Respondents had a variety of reasons for attending a particular mosque, including a style of worship and services that met their needs, available quranic schools, vibrant youth programs, or proximity to their homes.

Since forming or restoring a mosque requires funds, respondents asserted that women contribute consistently and substantially to the support and upkeep of the Somali mosques and Islamic centers. Fadumo reported that women levy themselves monthly so that they can contribute to the mosques' administrative and maintenance costs. She said, "Some of us are really struggling financially but they always pay because you know mosque charity always has priority." Moreover, respondents were proud of the fact that mosques and Islamic centers are well attended because they welcome all Muslims, including single females. They added that the mosques practice zero tolerance of clan divisions. The last two statements were important for the women because they wanted to demonstrate that they were sympathetic to single mothers. According to them, clannism begets divisiveness and animosity, and this is the reason their country is in disarray; thus, they wanted to avoid a similar experience in London. In other words, Muslimness transcending clan was a common theme appreciated by all Somali Islamic center-goers.

In general, the mosque was characterized by the women as an institution that has an important role in uplifting the community; bringing about political empowerment; and organizing and pooling the resources and talents of Somalis to change the narrative of a fractured community and families, and to help immigrants face economic, educational, religious and ethnic hardships in London. Mosques assumed multiple roles for women because of their

immigration experiences and living in a new sociocultural environment without the traditional family. Muhubo, a grandmother, believed that the mosque in London assumed this role of provider because the traditional nuclear family units and community had been destroyed by the civil war and replaced by the mosque. She shared that often the Islamic centers' Quran teachers and Imams assume the role of the extended family and provide support and services to mothers of young Somalis who are at risk. A considerable number of Somali diaspora families are single-parent families with mothers as heads of households (Affi, 1997). This was not the situation in Somalia, where only men held that position.

In London, women have had to make up for the social capital lost due to the absence of male heads of households. Mothers have had to step in and save traditional family values by taking on the responsibility for the transmission of religious beliefs and practices, which used to be a primary duty of the father. While teaching the Quran has come easier to these women, substituting for the father figure for their children, particularly for sons, has been difficult. Hence, London Somali mosques, while offering traditional rituals for the worshippers have expanded their roles and are actively building social capital by offering assistance to those dealing with the non-traditional expectations of their new environment.

### **Mosque as Communal Center: London**

In highlighting the communal role of mosques as centers of social bonding and refuge, respondents demonstrated the degree to which religion provides not only spiritual rewards but also earthly benefits in the form of social spaces and social centers for their community. For them, religion intersects with other social phenomena. For example, five respondents, Fadumo, Dahira, Zeynab, Muhubo, and Ruqiyo, who regularly attend the Quba Masjid and Education Centre or the Darussalam Masjid and Community Centre, asserted that the Imams advise them to

be wise in their voting choice and always select someone who has their same values or close to them. At same time they said that their mosques were not specifically involved in politics, which they did not mind because, according to them, mosques should play a greater role in bringing people together and strengthening community bonds. This contradiction is due to respondents' pre-migration political experience, a topic that I will discuss later.

Other respondents, Suada and Jamilah, regular attendees of the Al-Huda Cultural Centre and Mosque, asserted that mosque attendance had an important role in cultivating and directing their political action. According to Suada, a single mother with middle-school children, and Jamilah, a business owner and mother of three teenagers, the center facilitated effective engagement in political processes. They disclosed that after they started attending the Islamic center, they were taught valuable political information.

Respondents revealed that the mosque and Islamic center sponsors forums, and elected Muslim politicians or candidates who came to the center, made the members more aware of politics. Suada and Jamilah asserted that the focus of the center's leaders has been to inform and encourage their increased involvement in public affairs, both as individual citizens and as members of the mosques. Suada said, "I learned how certain policies affect us as Muslim citizens." When asked to give an example of those policies, she said, "I have young girls and I don't like my children to be taught sex [education] at school. With the help of the Islamic center, my friends and I learned ways to become more involved in school affairs."

Other participants, Cadar and Amran, who attended the Attaqwa Mosque, also disagreed with the sex education policy in London's public schools, but since their mosque was not interested in being involved in politics, they went to the Al-Huda Cultural Centre and Mosque to follow up on the issue. According to them, sex education empowers teenagers to make choices

about their sexual behavior, but these respondents would rather see the school empowering students to understand the value of family and respect abstinence. Thus, with the advice of their Islamic centers, these participants became involved in the difficult task of trying to revise the sex education policy.

Similarly, Jamilah asserted that she became a more engaged citizen and credited this to the monthly civic information session offered by the volunteers in the Islamic center. She was happy that the leaders were knowledgeable about policies as they shared their wisdom gained from the experience of offering social care and educational services at the center. She said that the leaders of the center encourage members to attend public forums, such as county council meetings, and to become involved in political activities. She stated, “The Imam told us when you attend the council meeting, you demonstrate that you care about your community and that you want to keep politicians accountable to their promises.” She continued, “I understand that the Imam wants Somalis to be visible in these meetings so politicians will come to know us and respect us.”

The comments of the respondents who felt that mosques had impacted their political involvement are comparable to observations from Jamal (2005) that mosque participation is directly related to increases in civic engagement; and from Ozyurt (2013), that high levels of religiosity influence Muslim immigrant women’s increased civic and political engagement.

Muslims in general, and Somalis in particular, face a range of challenges which Islamic centers and other Muslim organizations confront via increased social activity. After widespread claims that young Muslims are radicalizing and present a terroristic threat, British Muslims have had to deal with pervasive mistrust, hostility, and challenges to social inclusion (Hopkins & Gate, 2009). By confronting these challenges using political and civic engagement, these Islamic



organizations are reassuring the British public that the Islamic value system fits well with democracy and that Muslims also consider Britain their country. They are turning challenges into opportunities. Moreover, implicit in the request of the Imam to the women of the mosque is a powerful subtext suggesting that the Islamic center advocates for gender equality, which contradicts the widespread belief that Muslim women are oppressed and not allowed to participate in the public sphere.

### **Early Struggles with Religious Rights: Minneapolis**

The previous section demonstrates that for London respondents, Islam is a motivational stake that cultivates a bonding capital among them. The same can be said for Minneapolis respondents, as the majority of them could not imagine navigating American society without the intermediary agencies represented by the Muslim community and mosque. They shared that the mosque is an institution they trust and provides them with a good community setting in which to gain important political information and hone their political skills for political participation.

Through the course of my interviews, however, I found that when respondents talked about their relationship with the mosque and the role it plays in promoting their political engagement, they highlighted the struggle and challenges the community experienced over the public recognition of their religious values and practices and how this is still a process. For this reason, the early political involvement of respondents began due to the restrictions on the construction of mosques and other Islamic religious institutions and they were led to advocate and negotiate for their religious freedom.

Establishing religious institutions is an important step in the religion, cultural, structural, and political incorporation of immigrant communities into host societies. It is a process that requires commitment and cooperation between the immigrant community and the local

authorities so that immigrant religious institutions can be formed and legitimized (Cadge & Ecklund, 2007). For the Somali community of Minneapolis, the process of creating Islamic institutions has not been easy.

In contrast to London, where “Muslims are the second largest faith group” (Open Society Foundation, 2012, p. 1) and have an established history, Islam is relatively new to Minneapolis. It gained greater visibility with the arrival of the Somalis. In the early 1990s, when Somali refugees arrived in Minneapolis, many Minneapolitans were unfamiliar with the norms, values, and practices of Islam. Consequently, “[th]ere has been a long period of adjustment as Somalis have sought to educate Minnesotans about Islam and Minnesotans have gained more familiarity with Muslim religious practices” (Arnold, 2015, p. 426) .

With regard to the challenges that Somalis have confronted over the years, Basra, a community coordinator, echoed Arnold’s (2015) statement, as she commented on the Judeo-Christian-inspired cultural orientation to which Somalis had to adjust when they first arrived in Minneapolis. She said:

Somalis were the first community who championed multiculturalism in Minnesota. At the beginning this was hard. We were treated very badly; many Somalis were fired because they prayed on the job or were wearing the head-to-toe Muslim garment, jilbaab. We couldn’t have recognized mosques and Quran schools. Now we have county- and state-supported multicultural policies. There is public financing for multicultural programs. Certainly we succeeded in affirming our culture and religion and we set history, but there is still a lot to be done. We will continue to use multiculturalism as a form of anti-racism (Basra, Minneapolis).

Although the Somali immigrants’ resettlement in Minneapolis had a formative effect on the city’s Muslim culture, charting the course of Somali Muslims’ future in Minneapolis was challenging, to which the negative reactions to the establishing of mosques attest. Those like Ambaro, Daleys, and Jawahir, who actively championed the cause of mosques’ establishment in

the 1990s, certainly know this, as they talked about the shifting role of women in the mosque and the Somali community's struggles in planting their religion tradition in Minneapolis.

These respondents explained that in the 1990s, when the Somali refugees' presence increased in Minneapolis, community religious leaders who wanted to form formal and permanent mosques in the Somali-populated neighborhoods engaged them about the role women should play in the initiative. Because the mosque is held in high regard by women, who see it as a place of spiritual inspiration and learning and a gathering point for the community, male religious leaders often requested aid from women to raise funds with which to build mosques or to pay off debt. In fact, Ambaro, Daleys, and Jawahir asserted that women took the primary responsibility for raising money and pushing for the building of more mosques.

According to Ambaro, gender roles long have been distinct among observant Muslims, but with the diaspora came some changes: "the whole thing was new to us [women] because in Somalia we did not need to advocate for religious liberty nor did we need to raise money for mosques, because mosques were funded by rich businessmen and the government" (Ambaro, Minneapolis).

As Ambaro's passage indicates, women's involvement in the public affairs of mosques is new to the respondents. While in Somalia, women were not included in the leadership and decision making related to mosque governance, but in Minneapolis women replaced men in many roles, from fundraising to social work. The reason for the increase in mosque attendance in Minneapolis is similar to that of London in that the mosque is not only a space to worship, but it also functions as a community center, a place to develop familial relationships, a safe environment, and a learning facility specifically for the transmission of religious memory,

practice, and tradition to the next generation. The mosque addresses various communal needs which demonstrate its flexibility, versatility, and complex nature.

Respondents also articulated that as a new community in Minneapolis, they had to protect their embattled tradition. They remembered their frustration with restrictions on the construction of mosques and with discrimination against Somalis. Ambaro said:

For a while we [Somalis] met in community rooms or our apartments, and during religious holidays, we rented wedding halls. But when the community began to increase, we began to need a mosque for our children's future for Ramadan and Eid prayer. I collected money from family and friends, and they generously contributed. After we finally raised enough money to purchase a two-floor building to convert into a mosque, we found out that some people did not like the idea. They mobilized the community against the construction of the mosque, so we lost the space and we had to start looking for another space for sale, and this took way too long (Ambaro, Minneapolis).

In a similar vein, Daleys remembered how difficult and humiliating it was for them to learn that some residents had filed a petition with the city, claiming that the construction of a mosque in their neighborhood would have the effect of increasing social disorder, crime, and other problems that they alleged as a threat to the quality of life and image of their community. She said: "The way some residents talked was outrageous. They sounded as if they were objecting to a brothel moving into the neighborhood which would damage the neighborhood quality, not a place of worship" (Daleys, Minneapolis).

Jawahir wanted to stress the paradox of Americans' emphasis on the right of freedom of religion and the disturbing wave of bigotry and outright hostility that Somali Muslims experienced:

At the refugee camp, humanitarian officials would remind us how lucky we were in resettling in the US because America was a pluralist country that is founded on the idea of religious freedom. I never thought that we would have any problems with our religion, but with all the negativity and unfair targeting of Muslims for exercising their right to religious liberty, it feels as if Muslims are excluded from this freedom. When the Minneapolis government agreed to let us resettle here, [the officials certainly would have

been aware of] our religious affiliation and that eventually we would need to practice our religion, unless they thought that once we were in Minneapolis we would stop being Muslims (Jawahir, Minneapolis).

Jawahir's disappointment echoes that of many Somalis who confused the city's offer to resettle with acceptance. Instead, they had to confront obstacles to their freedom to worship and observance, and the government stymied their efforts to become something other than unwanted Muslims and second-class citizens. Jawahir's comment also illustrates the expectation for assimilation that America had for refugees—they would come to the United States, become Americanized, and over time they would become very strong Americans who were not attached to their religion and tradition. As believing and practicing Muslims, the respondents want to live and prosper like Muslims, which means setting up institutions that establish the Muslim community as a legitimate part of Minneapolis. However, the stigmatization of Muslims as fanatics and extremists who are disloyal to America has perpetuated cycles of ignorance and hate. This has motivated many Muslims, including the respondents, to politically engage in activities that endeavor to alleviate injustices toward Muslims.

### **Social Bonding in the Somali Mosques: Minneapolis Respondents**

The mosque as an institution that harnesses religious solidarity endows the respondents with social resources that compensate for their disadvantages as a minority group. Community networks, loyalty, and mutual trust not only facilitate adjustment, but they also enable the religious observant to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. The mosques and Islamic centers that Minneapolis respondents reported attending were Abubakar As-Sadique, Dar Al Hijra, and the Umatul Islam Center. By examining the kind of support Minneapolis respondents attribute to the mosques, two categories of political empowerment are identified:

direct mobilization from the mosques' leadership and indirect mobilization from their fellow mosque sisters.

Mosque leaders educate attendees about the enduring challenges that Islam faces and the options available to change this negative narrative, such as using their political power and voting for candidates that are against Islamophobia. Halimo, in her 50s and a mother stated:

In the Friday *khudba* during election time, our Imam urges us to protect our civil rights through political participation, because laws passed by politicians affect our lives. He reminds us that if we need help with understanding the voting process, we shouldn't be embarrassed, there are organizations that provide civic skill-building training (Halimo, Minneapolis).

Daleys also mentioned the political messages that Imams provide as they want the mosque attendees to become aware of social issues and stimulate them to appropriate action:

The Imam and other mosque leaders restate that we [Somalis] need to be engaged in political life, because if we stay out of the city's politics and we are not involved, then we can't influence it. They talk about how Somalis are experiencing many social and economic issues that are not the politicians' priorities. Before we started voting, we weren't heard, but now that we are voting every politician is paying attention to us and our needs (Daleys, Minneapolis).

Another participant, Qaali, mentioned that in 2006 when Keith Ellison, an African American Muslim, was running for Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District in Minneapolis, the majority of the Imams supported him. On November 7, 2006, when Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison was elected as the first Muslim to serve in the US Congress, all Somali voters were proud and felt powerful.

I will discuss the respondents' voting attitudes and choices further; here I wanted to highlight that mosques sometimes are used for political mobilization, through the distribution of voting guides or other political material.

## **Mosque Sisters**

Other respondents reported that conversation and informal political interaction in mosques with other attendees is also a stimulus of political engagement as effective as the Imam's messages. These respondents indicated that social communication in mosques helps in sharing important information and sometimes is transformed into activism and advocacy. That is because these exchanges happen between devout women within mosque contexts, and the sacred nature of these informal connections allow a high level of observance to group civic norms. Rather than being between casual acquaintances, mosque-goers' political conversations often occur among trusted religious women who regularly interact with each other and have different experiences and backgrounds. Owing to the fact that Somali diaspora women are becoming more observant and practicing Muslims, the women who are involved in the Minneapolis mosques represent an increasingly diverse range of social positions. The ranks of women mosque-goers include married women, college students, professionals, lawyer, doctors, business owners, single mothers, women with limited education and work experience, and many others. This pool of mosque attendees defies generalization as it encompasses a range of ages, household positions, educational backgrounds, work experiences, and scales of operation.

Respondents suggested that diverse women who share their personal and professional experiences and challenges during the mosque meetings serve as important learning mechanisms, which they considered relevant for the construction of solidarities and an active citizenship. Mosque meetings therefore can be seen as occasions for mobilizing women for broad-based policy change. Two respondents, Shacni and Dahabo, both mothers and in their late 50s, recounted specific incidents where conversation or complaints shared by several mothers resulted in interest in politics and mosque group involvement. Shacni said, "Talking with the

mosque attendees, I came to know so much more about community issues and how these issues are political.” She mentioned that low-income mothers, recipients of subsidized childcare services who were part of the child-care provider staff where their children were enrolled, were told by their childcare worker that new rules may be implemented. Shacni recounted how the issue unfolded: a conservative media watchdog group had launched an investigation (into state subsidized daycares) and found a loophole in the system that it claimed led to childcare service abuses by parents and providers, allegedly at taxpayers’ expense. To close the loophole, conservative state representatives introduced a bill that would restrict mothers from receiving childcare assistance if they were also employed at the daycare where their children were enrolled. Shacni said:

We [mosque women] know how hard is for Somali women with limited language [skills] to find a job. If mothers get the opportunity to work in a daycare where the language barrier is not a problem, then it’s not fair to restrict this option. Public assistance workers expect these women to find a job or otherwise their welfare assistance will be denied. How is it possible for refugee mothers who have many problems to learn fluently the English language and find competitive jobs other than the daycare run by Somali providers? As mothers, we felt called to stand in solidarity. We asked what can be done to stop the bill? (Shacni, Minneapolis).

Shacni asserted that because the mothers had no expertise in welfare system regulations and politics, a lawyer named Sharifa who attends the mosque provided them information about policy governance and offered an idea which became a plan for the women. Sharifa explained to the group that they needed to apply a proactive strategy and become advocates for the issue and to contact their state representatives so their representatives would work on stopping the bill from being introduced in the legislature.

Dahabo’s testimonial related to mothers whose sons were incarcerated. She shared that these mothers, whom the mainstream community may fault for the wrongdoing of their children,



seek psychological counsel and support from the mosque. She described how the anguish of these mothers compels many women to work for political change. Dahabo said:

During our Quran reading break, two mothers shared that often they are the only individuals advocating on behalf of their children. They were not saying that their sons were innocent, but that they deserved rehabilitation rather than punishment. We told them that in us they had found sisters who wanted to help and work toward making changes in their situations and the system (Dahabo, Minneapolis).

Dahabo communicated that these two mothers' stories motivated other women to get involved in social justice efforts. A young woman among them who works as an organizer with a nonprofit organization told those interested in the issues that she would connect them to a leading local activist who engages families in the struggle to reform juvenile and criminal justice. A project the women wanted to undertake was an effort to ensure those Somali youth and their families who were directly affected play a meaningful role in the efforts to reform policies around youth confinement in the Minneapolis jail system. Dahabo said: "We found that if we were mad enough about something, we didn't think about being shy. We just thought about articulating what it was that we needed to articulate. We wanted community-based alternatives to incarceration."

From the respondents' testimony, it is evident that they have experienced processes of learning which are relevant for the construction of solidarities and an active citizenship. Their responsibility toward the community and each other is often tied closely to the religious faith, values, and traditions that, for many women, constitute their sense of what the community should be. When these values are violated, women describe first feelings of disappointment, followed by a sense of moral outrage that politicizes them.

## **Somali Community Organizations**

Some of the broader research literature on immigrant associations has suggested such associations have the potential to serve as vehicles for political mobilization and participation (Bloemraad, 2005; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Tillie 1999). In this study, I argue that, in addition to mosques, community-based organizations have a significant impact on the first-generation respondents' political lives. Somali community organizations (SCOs) play a key role in assisting their clients in different phases of their migration; provide an array of social services and community programs that are designed to help them in their socio-economic and cultural adjustment and incorporation into the host society; and operate as connections between immigrant communities, their countries of origin, and the host state.

The SCOs in Minneapolis and London are rooted in the refugee solidarity groups set up in the 1990s (Abikar Noor & Mahboub 2011; Griffiths, 2002; Haji-Abdi, 2013), but that later expanded their focus to community integration and political empowerment. Although the main intention of forming Somali community-based organizations was to create, express, and maintain a collective identity, some contend that these organizations are poorly organized and fragmented by clan affiliations (Abikar Noor & Mahboub, 2011; Griffith, 2004). Abikar Noor and Mahboub (2011) stated:

There are more than forty-five Somali community organizations in the US. However, some of these community organizations have clan affiliated names. Some examples include: Somali Benadiri Community of Minnesota, Somali Mai Community of Minnesota, Somali Bantu Community Organization and Somali International Minorities of America. The negative connotation of associating with a particular clan or group led others to either establish rival organizations or seek assistance elsewhere, thus rendering most of these organizations ineffective. (p. 40)

Similarly, in the British context, Haji-Abdi (2013) asserted that SCOs are plagued by internal friction and sometimes are ineffective in establishing a unified voice for better policies.

At the same time, Haji-Abdi recognized that although SCOs may not always be impressive, they are still important for understanding the community issues and integration processes. With an auspicious tone, he wrote: “SCOs have the potential to re-establish their role as a hub for community integrating and restatement, and also build the confidence of the Somali Diaspora Community” (Haji-Abdi, 2013, p. 4). I agree with Haji-Adbi’s view that SCOs have the potential to incorporate the members of the community into their new country. In this section, I demonstrate that first-generation women consider vital the work, services, and familiar environment that these organizations provide. Respondents participate in Somali organizations because of stability; that is, SCOs replicate the sense of community to which Somalis had been accustomed back home. Also, in these organizations people speak the same language and share similar cultural norms, which may foster group solidarity. Additionally, these organizations have been instrumental in instituting transnational practices within the existing organizations, which is an important factor for the first-generation respondents.

In short, rather than joining nonethnic organizations, it seems that the respondents preferred SCOs even with all their problems. This was evident from their responses to a question about why they did not join mainstream organizations since clan is an issue in the Somali-managed organizations. Interviewees asserted that they had experienced a lack of cultural and religious sensitivity from mainstream organizations. Many respondents recognized that deep-rooted social barriers prevented them from seeking help from mainstream associations as they faced issues regarding negative images and the stereotyping of Somali women. They reported that mainstream organizations were ignorant of the importance of family relations, religious traditions, and the gender roles that underlie the whole Somali way of life. That is, Somali women perceive their issues as community issues and gender as inextricably linked to

other aspects of their society. According to them, the mainstream organizations pursued an aggressive agenda, including raising questions about religious and cultural practices such as the wearing of the hijab. Mainstream organizations saw this as submissive behavior to a male hierarchy and thus created reservations about the suitability of these women's service in organizations that were concerned with equality.

Before analyzing the social capital of the SCOs, it is important to describe in more detailed the relationship between the SCOs and the respondents.

### **Homey Feelings: Women and Community Organizations**

One of the common characteristics of diaspora women in this study was their active attempts to build networks and formal or informal relationships with those from like backgrounds, with the intent of developing the bonding social capital necessary to vigorous communities.

As the preceding section suggested, for first-generation women it is easier to be part of the SCOs instead of non-Somali groups because the former understand their needs. Many respondents reported that they trusted SCOs and felt that they could find protection from the unfamiliar and excluding outside world. Jamilah commented that her nostalgia for Somali has been alleviated since getting involved in an SCO: "Now I go to the organization where I can meet women and talk about what is happening back home and elsewhere. Since I started going to the organization, I've got more friends. I don't feel as homesick as before."

Moreover, these SCOs attract women as members because they do not often follow the structure of non-Somali organizations, and women literally feel at home. Organizations I observed both in London and Minneapolis provided opportunities for socialization through the

same practices as in Somalia. Women came with their children so they could play with other children, without formal daycare, and the children were supervised by any adult in the area. Other women would come by themselves for social gathering, gossiping, or getting community information without having time or space restrictions and reservation or fees. Some others would conduct business, advertising or selling ethnic merchandise. In creating such relaxed spaces, the leaders understood the importance of allowing the public space to serve the private need.

Utilizing traditional cultural norms, the organizations have developed strategies for organizing women. For example, the SCOs remain respectful of the Islamic gender order in social spaces. Often men and women's seating arrangements at events are kept separated. Many respondents deem the community organizations vital for the reproduction of Somaliness because they organize events such as religious and national holiday celebrations.

The SCOs are effective because they are located in familiar surroundings as most of these organizations are in areas of higher concentrations of the Somali population. This is important for any first-generation respondents who do not drive, as the commute is manageable. The SCOs' success can be attributed to the conscious use of bonding mechanisms among members from varied backgrounds. They address the needs of new arrivals as well as the needs of those who have been in the country a long time. They have sought to shape their social activities in ways that would facilitate civic engagement.

The SCOs' strategies can be separated into two broad categories: (a) direct services that include resettlement, housing, language services, employment training and placement, women and youth programs on the one hand, and (b) advocating for resource allocation, which involves citizenship and civic workshops to develop the community's political empowerment.

## **Community Organizations as Civic and Political Education Hubs**

For the participants, these organizations serve as important vehicles for civic engagement as the organizations facilitate voting through political education and provide a platform for community-based activities and mobilization.

**London.** The discussion in this and the next section is structured around Haji-Abdi's (2013) considerations of SCOs as a hub for community integration. The SCOs purposely or unwittingly tend to have a nonassimilative role; they stress the adjustment of Somali immigrants to the British culture and society without the total loss of their own Somali background. Interviewees reported that they were involved in various SCOs for different services, but two seemed to assist them with community building and political education.

Based on the perspective of one respondent, Zeynab, the SCOs must create activities and provide services that will allow them to apply for grants and funding; this will allow them to expand their membership, build a base, and increase effectiveness. As service providers, their approach is to assist community members in areas where they lack, such as: English language skills, knowledge of immigrant regulations, citizenship classes, employment, and affordable housing programs. Involvement in these sectors is an advantage because these issues often become focal points of political contention and mobilization in the community, as we will see in the next chapter.

It was recognized by almost all respondents that SCOs are gradually becoming the primary hub where first-generation immigrants can learn civic skills and mobilize to participate in political and nonpolitical activities. Due to their nonpartisan nature, the SCOs are courted by

virtually every political party. Ardo said, “Politicians recognize immigrants as citizens only during elections.” Amran, Cadar, and Fatumo from East London asserted that Waltham Forest Somali community has been providing programs related to comprehending the basic political process, the importance of voting, and information about the government’s responsibility to accommodate different cultures in the voting process. Amran, in her late 50s, stated, “If it were not for some Somali organizations that help people like me that don’t understand English, it would be impossible for us to understand how to vote.”

Further, with increasing discrimination against migrants and other minorities, these organizations teach the respondents how to effectively counter racism and demand their rights as citizens. Other respondents, Dahira and Muhubo, revealed that their understanding of racism in a majority White society came as Ocean Somali Community Association provided instructions about how to deal with their first encounters with racists. Dahira elaborated, saying:

I am aware about my Somali and Muslim background, but when I go to the Somali organizations it feels good to see the young generation who are demanding to be accepted as British and teaching us older generation to feel at home and participate in the politics of London. I liked when a young girl said to us, “Mamo, this is your country, and if racists are harassing you because of your Muslim appearance, then come here and tell us. We will ask the city council to address the issue”. [This] smart young girl was telling us that we needed to elect someone who would protect our rights (Dahira, London).

This shows that the community organizations are equipped to function as civic intermediaries and assist their members to gather political power to fight against Islamophobia and racism. The community leaders are aware that racists have constructed Islam and Muslims as a moral threat and hindrance to the social cohesion of London. Therefore, SCOs strive to counter this narrative by furthering the recognition of Somalis as citizens, and political participation is one important avenue to this accomplishment.

**Minneapolis.** Hardy-Fanta's (1993) study of political participation in Boston indicates that Latinos who participated in group activities established social ties and personal connections that increased their propensity to be politically active. She also found that Boston Latinos were more likely to participate in politics if community leaders encouraged their involvement and were integral in facilitating the formation of social ties among them.

Similarly, for the Somali community, if leaders provided activities and education aimed at civic engagement, participants became politically involved. The leaders of several SCOs in Minneapolis and London whom I visited during data collection indicated that political participation in these two locations is greater among those with adequate expertise in political knowledge and language skills. The community associations' effort is to provide services that counter this imbalance and overcome the disparity in participation.

In Halimo's account, the primary goal of these organizations is to provide the Somali communities and individuals with access to resources to which they would not otherwise have access because they care about their community. Similar to London SCOs, the Minneapolis SCOs assist their members with English language skills, health care, legal advice, and knowledge of US history and civics. Halimo remarked:

The leaders of these organizations are our guys. They are committed to our rights; they know our cultural heritage and the gloomy conditions that our community is facing in Minneapolis. Since they know the system better, they want to do something about it, and if that means they are going to teach us politics, then we will learn (Halimo, Minneapolis).

Ambaro and Shacni reported that SCOs gave them the confidence to participate in electoral politics. Ambaro said, "I did not know anything about voter registration until a volunteer at the organization explained it to us during our citizenship course."



When these organizations were unable to provide Somali immigrants with more than citizenship and political literacy due to legal restrictions, they were referred to political grassroots organizations that offered information in the Somali language about a political party or a candidate's position. This highlights that the respondents had access not only to the social capital of the SCOs with which they were affiliated but also to the social capital of other organizations that had relationships with the Somali organizations. For example, 6 out of 10 of the first-generation respondents from Minneapolis stated that they benefited from these affiliated organizations' interpreters during elections as volunteers assisted voters who had language barriers.

### **Justifying Lack of Civic Skill and Language**

Although respondents from both locations were appreciative of the assistance offered by the community organizations, they felt deeply uncomfortable in admitting their need for civic skills and, in particular, language assistance. Often they would remind me that they are self-sufficient women and the language barrier did not mean that they lacked agency, authority, or intelligence. Raxo explained her relationship with the Somali organization:

The people at this organization are helpful when it comes to interpreting and providing us translators during election time, but don't assume that I am not educated because I don't speak much English. I graduated from Gaheyr University in Somalia, so when you see me around don't consider me as "Flight 13." I have my own business and make decisions for my household (Raxo, Minneapolis).

By referring to "Flight 13," Raxo distinguishes herself from those she considers to be low-class Somalis. "Flight 13" is a derogatory term used among Somalis in Minneapolis. It refers to the first flight from Kenya to transport many refugees whose education, class, and wealth was not acquired by their social status at birth but rather because of the opportunities found in Minneapolis.

In the above extract, Raxo makes a couple of compelling points. First, she wants to make sure that her lack of English proficiency is not confused with lack of capacity or inability to make effective choices. Her ability to have a voice in Minneapolis and participation in formal politics should not be measured by her English speaking or lack thereof. Second, since immigrating to the United States, Raxo experienced a downward shift both in her career and in her quality of life. She resents her loss of status and wanted me to be aware that she is an educated woman who can manage her own business. Because we both live in Minneapolis, she wanted me to respect and recognize her status instead of seeing her as a needy refugee who needed a translator for Election Day.

However, these women met the challenges with resilient strategies, and the presence of community-based organizations played a role in helping them to participate in the public life of Minneapolis. Ambaro articulated her sentiment regarding the English language being the key to civic participation in the political process:

In saying that I and other women use the language service offered by the community organizations, I hope you don't see us as low-class and illiterate women who depend on others for their daily needs. That is not who we are. We are mothers and wives who prioritized their family's future and children's education and this required us to concentrate on the advancement of our family rather than going to school to learn English. I think this is something that we have in common with all immigrant women. So as long we have translators, broken English will not stop us from voting. And, by the way, our needs create jobs for bilingual people within our communities, so we are still helping our community overall by our need for interpreters (Ambaro, Minneapolis).

For the women of this group, motherhood and agency are important. Ambaro believes that women like her have choices. If they had wanted to learn the English language to become literate in English, they could have, but they opted to give priority to the home life and the raising of their children to ensure a better future. She is resentful about the challenges that diaspora locations placed upon them. However, she stated that using a translator is a way to

navigate the language barrier and participate in the political process. Ambaro highlighted that as an immigrant woman she is accomplished in her role of mother, and so she is able to ignore what others may think about her inability to speak English. Above all, Ambaro pointed out that language barriers do not exclude her from exercising her voting rights, as long as community organizations can assist her with this limitation.

### **Women's Networks: Informal Groups Create Political Socialization**

The women of this study all belonged to several networks and interest groups concurrently. While the effects of membership in ethnic groups and associations have received attention, there has been little study of the political consequences of immigrants' informal social interactions. There is compelling evidence that demonstrates the role that social resources and traditional networks play in the immigrants' settlement and incorporation into their new countries (Hagan 1994; Werbner, 2002), but much less attention has been paid to their role in facilitating political interests and participation.

Relationships with families, friends, and neighbors from Somalia or relationships that were established in the refugee camps continue to develop in the social networks of Minneapolis and London. These networks have become an important tool as they lead to the accumulation of social capital and the sharing of experiences in adaptation. These ties engender a high level of solidarity within a group structure while building new contacts with other Somali, which effectively mobilize women around a common purpose.

All the first-generation respondents of my study have bonding ties with fellow Somali women. The relationships they established back in the homeland or in countries such as Kenya continue over many years. Thus, they serve as the foundation for the first generation to develop social networks with multidimensional influence and impact that are central for the relocation

and flourishing of agency and empowerment. *Hagbad* or *ayuuuto* is an example of such a network that has economic impact and political influence on its members.

*Hagbad* is a traditional gendered Somali practice meant as a savings group where women meet monthly and make a predetermined payment to build a capital sum for the group. At the end of each month, they take turns receiving the total pool of money to use for personal financial goals. *Hagbad* is valued by the respondents and other Somalis because there is no interest accrued or paid, which would violate the tenets of Islam. Muhubo, Halimo, and Jawahir, and almost all the respondents shared that they are part of a *hagbad* women's financial group. In Jawahir's account, her group takes turns, but when an emergency arises, the order can be shifted to accommodate members' financial needs. Summerfield's (1993) study about this rotating method of finance among Somali women in the UK discussed how the most deprived women were able to use the collected money for large purchases such as cars or tuition that otherwise would have been unaffordable.

Participating in *hagbad* entails structure and discipline, and the selection of members is based on mutual trust. In describing the interpersonal relationship and trust building that goes into the various Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA), for instance, Datta (2012) stated that in the Somali *hagbad* group responsibility is vested in group managers who often are elders and respected community members with familiarity and oversight of local communities. These leaders also provide a forum for discussions of issues that impact finance, such as politics.

The assertion that the core concept of the *hagbad* relies on the stable interaction of a self-selected group of people who use a traditional hierarchical structure (Datta, 2012) to meet regularly to discuss *hagbad* terms is thus substantiated. However, studies about *hagbad*, including those of Datta (2012), and Summerfield (1993), have not developed their analysis

further to include what other opportunities the *hagbad* presents to diaspora women. That is, while keeping women accountable for their finances, the *hagbad* meetings also offer time to discuss issues other than money.

Based on accounts provided by the respondents, I propose that the *hagbad* serves important and diverse nonfinancial functions for first-generation respondents, including the fostering of interpersonal relationships and the development of networks that allow them self-representation when in public. When the women gather together over tea and sweets to discuss the financials of their *hagbad*, there is also the opportunity to discuss issues that are affecting the local and transnational community. They gather information and form opinions as to what is to be done. This is because the *hagbad* method as a traditional practice uses embedded resources in women's group relations and gives the respondents a sense of cultural continuity and maintenance of their Somali identity as well as helps situate their identity in this new society.

In other words, the *hagbad*, as a “translocation of cultural practices” (Werbner, 2005, p. 8), provides the respondents an outlet for creative action that blends elements of two major frameworks for collective action: social network and womanhood. The first generation's new confidence in political participation reflects a new identity, prompting scholars to interpret these actions in terms of feminism, which would not be seen as such by these first-generation women.

Women as active agents have a stake in preserving Somali culture because “culture as a medium of social interaction confers agency within a field of power relations” (Werbner, 2005, p. 7). At the same time, there is developing a new consciousness for Somali women which includes public collective action independent from men. In many of the women's *hagbad* meetings, there is a shift in focus from individual financial needs to community action issues needing cooperative attention, such as discrimination and exclusion. This demonstrates that

first-generation respondents have employed grassroots community strategies for demanding change and equality.

### **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have empirically examined the type of social capital and networks utilized by the first-generation respondents and the extent to which social capital and networks have an impact on their political engagement. My findings demonstrate a deep pool of bonding social capital among first-generation respondents. Contrary to the findings of other studies (Morales & Pilati, 2011; Putnam, 2000), this social support that is regulated by norms of reciprocity does not restrict them from political participation.

The results offer a glimpse into the social and organizational complexity of mosque attributes that bear on their potential political impact. Of course, not all mosque members claim to gain politically relevant resources in their mosques. Some choose to participate in mosque activities that address community wellbeing, but others choose to participate in mosque activities intended for political empowerment. My analysis demonstrates the importance of social relationships in structuring their access to and participation in congregational activities that provide skill-building opportunities.

Somali community-based associations in London and Minneapolis, although not perfect, have important social and civic educational functions that mainstream organizations are unable to fulfill. For example, SCOs are able to offer concurrently political activities (such as voter registration training) and cultural activities (such as Somali language training and exposure to Somali culture for the young generation or events such as Somali Independence Day celebrations). Since the purpose of mainstream organizations is generally to integrate immigrants, they are not committed to supporting the preservation of immigrants' traditional

culture or the teaching of languages other than English. Additionally, the policy concerns around which SCOs mobilize their members tend to be more specific in scope. They are likely to mobilize around issues affecting the community, as I will show in the next chapters. These activities appreciated by the respondents distinguish them from non-Somali organizations.

Yet, although the Somali community-based organizations in London and Minneapolis are community focused and create bonding social capital, they also coach the respondents to take part in the democratic processes of these two locations. Therefore, my study's results partially disagree with Putnam's (2000) argument on the outcome of bonding ties. According to Putnam, the ties which form in bonding organizations are "inward looking," thus not contributing to the progress of the larger society. Based on my findings, it can be argued that Somali associations and religious centers, which function through bonding social capital, actually stimulate the political participation of the older-generation respondents. This political mobilization has led to the democratic election of both local and national representatives. Engaging in this democratic process is one of the most important steps toward a healthy society, so the respondents' participation—made possible by the social capital of bonding social networks—benefits the society as a whole.

My analysis has also shown that informal social networks, though often overlooked, generate social capital that can be utilized for political purposes and incorporation. Newcomers tend to rely heavily on their communities and social networks, and this compensates for other disadvantages in their new homes. Typically, networks are seen as influential in crafting productive social capital, including social relations, which will in turn facilitate integration (Coleman, 1988). The informal social network is the result of strong cultural retention as well as family and friendship networks, along with high solidarity levels among the first generation.

This reciprocal trust then develops high levels of bonding social capital that has given the respondents of my study the confidence to perhaps organize also around everyday political issues that directly impact their community

In the introductory section, I anticipated that due to the two communities' common struggles, it would be possible to find more communality than differences. The results of the chapter confirm my prediction and show more common features between the two groups. Probably the most important distinction between Minneapolis and London respondents is in regard to the types of resources offered by mosques. While both Minneapolis and London respondents recognized that the social interaction in mosque settings helped them in acquiring important political information and transformed them into more active participants in the political process, the London respondents talked less than their Minneapolis counterparts about forms of political information and activism independent of Imams' messages. Their attitudes were more conservative than those of the Minneapolis respondents in the sense that hierarchy, obedience to authority, and conformity were more appealing than other forms of social relations, such as interaction with other women. Underscoring the Imams' political encouragement and advice as the only options that are available in the mosques is their way of circumventing the idea of putting the Imams' authority and wisdom at the same level as those of other individuals. The respondents' observation of hierarchy, balance, and order could derive from their belief that conservatism and respect for authority make South Asian communities "model communities," as Dahira explained earlier, and thus these behaviors deserve to be imitated.

In sum, I have demonstrated in this chapter that bonding social capital acquired by the respondents through mosques, Somali associations, and *hagbad* groups prepared diaspora women to overcome personal and political resource constraints, such as restricted mastery of the



English language and lack of the civic skills necessary to grasp the political complexity of their new countries. The bonding capital is also used as conduit to build transnational solidarity among the respondents. In the next chapters I explore how the respondents actually put into practice the skills they acquired.

## Chapter 6: First Generation Respondents' Political Participation in Minneapolis and London

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the first generation Somali diaspora women's political orientation and attitude by the means of an empirical study. I have used the narratives of the interviewed to investigate the first generation respondents' political participation, and this became the basis for justifying their activities as political agency. I begin with two stories that illuminate the political context of this chapter.

Qaali and Muhubo are both mothers in their late fifties. When the civil war erupted in Somalia, they were in their thirties and at the peak of their careers. Qaali owned a thriving business in Somalia and used to travel to the Arab peninsula and Italy on business. She was married to a pilot with a good income, and they were part of an up-and-coming Somali middle/high class. Her life collapsed when the country collapsed as she lost her business, her store was looted and destroyed, and her marriage eventually dissolved.

In 1993, Qaali and her family decided to move to Kenya where they applied for refugee status to be resettled in a third country. They lived in a refugee camp for many years, and based on Qaali's description, the camp was a squalid hellhole. When they were accepted as refugees to the US, her husband decided to stay back in Kenya. According to Qaali, he hoped things would get better soon in Somalia and he could go back. After years apart, he got another wife in Kenya, and Qaali felt betrayed and divorced him. She never remarried.

In Minneapolis, Qaali tried to utilize her former entrepreneurial skills and start a business, which she had to close soon after as her business income affected her public assistance eligibility. "It was a matter of reliability, and public assistance was more secure for my family,"

she said. At the time of this interview, Qaali's children were grown up with their own families, despite the financial hardships of their childhood.

Muhubo shared that she has a B.A. degree from the Somali National University. When the civil war erupted, she was a newlywed and had just been promoted to being the aide to the minister of education. As a consequence of the civil war, her family moved frequently and after living in a refugee camp, finally arrived in London in 1997. Not long after their resettlement in London, Muhubo's husband descended into depression. After years in treatment, the family decided to send him back to Somalia to live with his brother. With sadness and nostalgia, Muhubo said, "If the civil war never happened, who knows how our life would have been...maybe my husband would not be sick with depression and I would be the head of the education department."

Qaali and Muhubo's vignettes highlight the centrality of downward mobility as an obstacle to success but also provided vivid detail of the exclusion and stigmatization experienced by the refugees. For example, Muhubo, in talking about the humiliations she endured when perceived as being uneducated, uncivilized and lacking social graces, said:

My social worker would often remind me to turn off the water after I was done using it so my bill will be manageable...I never said this to her, but there were times I was tempted to answer and tell [her] I am not stupid or uncivilized to the point that I cannot understand that water needs to be shut off when I am not using...That is when I realized that life in [the] UK won't be easy and I won't be able to have the same lifestyle, job and respect that I had in Somalia...and now you are asking me about politics? (Muhubo, London).

Muhubo connects her lack of politicization with her lack caused by the downward mobility and stigmatizations. She is also pointing out the impact of the vicious stereotype of

being considered “uncivilized” as Somali immigrants and that certainly “the way a group is received affects its members’ economic and social well-being” (Waters, 2013, p. 55). As another sensible point, Muhubo expresses that immigration is not always an advantage for women (Espiritu, 1997; Pessar, 1998), as it has the potential to alter their middle-class lifestyle by placing them in a lower status.

A number of feminist studies have addressed the plight that middle-class immigrant women encounter in obtaining jobs in the resettled country commensurate with their qualifications (Mojab, 1999). More importantly, Muhubo highlighted that this loss is not limited to the diaspora location, but it affects her status within her transnational family because many family members rely on her. She stated, “In Somalia, with my income and married woman status, I was able to maintain my family, and I was respected for that. Now I send sporadic money, and I make excuses that I am a single mother.” Indirectly, Muhubo explains the hidden gendered nature of migration and downward mobility that impacted their societal values for the fulfillment of family responsibility and the status of a nuclear family.

Family is an essential institution in Somali community, and all my respondents mentioned their strong family ties, both local and transnational, as a characteristic that distinguishes them from the British and Americans. Somalis see themselves not just in the context of the immediate family, but their identity, roles and responsibilities extend to their wider family and kinship as well. In Muhubo’s case, migration undermines these cultural aspects both back home, and in the diaspora location as it damages important characteristics of Somali culture, making her more vulnerable as she is now lacking traditional social capital that would have existed from her former social status.

There were other respondents, who like Muhubo, made connections between loss of human capital and their lack of politicization. Ambaro from Minneapolis, who in Somalia was a middle school teacher, and Cadar, from London, agreed that political participation was not their priority because they were busy figuring out how to make ends meet and raise children in a new country with a different culture. Respondents explained that downward mobility caused by devaluation of their educational credentials combined with other forms of discrimination were to blame for their lack of interest in formal political participation. They saw formal politics as part of the system that has rejected them, devalued them, and considered them uncivilized, so they are more interested in unconventional politics.

Words like “discrimination,” “devaluated education” and “refugee” suggest that respondents felt like outsiders and in many ways viewed themselves as deprived of rights they were counting on, such as the right to a decent life in the West. Not only did respondents demonstrate dissatisfaction with not achieving the expected Western standard of living, but also with how Somali women have been represented within American and British popular culture and how such representations can reinforce stereotypes of passive and oppressed women. First generation respondents reported the same inequalities that are experienced by immigrants overall, who are often defined as the “other,” because of the structural and institutional discrimination that permeates dominant American and British institutions and influences the ways immigrants are regarded.

Moreover, while connecting their political participation to experiences of exclusion and their levels of human capital, respondents articulated the dilemmas that are common to immigrants from African countries trying to adjust in Western countries. Thus, the study supports the conclusion of Nwadiora (1995) that, contrary to non-immigrant Blacks who are

familiar with bigotry, “the immigrants’ reaction to the newly discovered racism is that...they are frustrated that in a country where they believed they could reach any level of progress, suddenly their skin color is a barrier to them” (p. 67).

Although racism is new to the respondents, this does not mean they don’t challenge it. Issues stemming from intolerance and injustice have prompted them to develop strategies to challenge everyday discriminations and stigmatization. Social scientists have documented multiple forms of antiracism reactions employed by stigmatized groups and individuals to counter racism and injustices (Kusow, 2004).

Kusow (2004) suggested that Somali Canadians in response to racism enact “separate systems of honor” through practices of honoring and uplifting their culture. For my respondents, in order to place themselves in a respectable position and challenge stigmatization, they consider themselves as invited guests. This is articulated in the following quotes from two respondents, Dahabo from Minneapolis and Ardo from London:

I know that sooner or later I will go back to Somalia. In the meanwhile, I have what I need. I am grateful to Americans for their hospitality. We have been given house, income, options to have malls and Islamic centers where our religion and cultural identity is kept intact and performed through language and learning of Quran, which gives us a sense of home. This is all that matters for me and for all of us. We have a place where we can await our fate because you are nothing without a country (Dahabo, Minneapolis).

England and many other Western countries opened their doors for us. They welcomed us. They did not turn their back on us the same way rich Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia did. We need to not forget this and stop complaining about frivolous things. The [Somali] community in London in the last years has changed in so many ways. If we want Somali products, we can go and shop at Southall. We have also places for weddings and community gathering. Alhamdulillah [thanks to God] in London, practicing Islam has never been an issue, but it is still not Somalia. That is all that integration can do for someone of my age. Now that I have my passport, my plan Inshallah [God willing] is to go to the Hajj [Mecca] and then go back to Somalia. Things

are much better in many northern regions. When my son and grandchildren decide to come back home, I will be there waiting for them (Ardo, London).

Dahabo and her family came to Minneapolis in the 1990s. She is a mother of three adult children. Back in Somalia, Dahabo worked as an administrative assistant and due to her lack of English language skills, her previous administrative experience did not qualify her for a similar position in Minneapolis; rather than apply for welfare she worked at minimum wage jobs. Ardo, a grandmother, moved to London in 2000 after having lived in three different countries outside Somalia. This created a sense of displacement and filled her with the desire to return to her native Somalia. For many first generation respondents, like Dahabo and Ardo, who were part of an emerging middle class in Somalia, nostalgia functions as a symptom of and reaction to displacement and loss. These memories of a homeland that no longer exists, still give meaning to their identity and helps this group avoid being stigmatized as they consider their stay temporary. Nevertheless this has implications in their political participation as being a guest allows them to limit their political interests while they live in a transnational limbo.

My argument in this dissertation is that the respondents engage in politics as a response to discrimination and stigmatization. However, their initial claim gives a sense of a political apathy. To better understand this contradiction as well as the respondents' mindset on these activities, I examined their transition from the relatively simple Somali political practices to their engagement in the complexity of a democratic system. I discussed with respondents their reasons for voting and the extent to which motivations, resources and levels of opportunity influenced their participation. I further examined how traditional cultural practices of female networking remerged as a part of the relocation process and how this affected political agency. In other words, the focus here is both the political orientations and behavioral strategies that this group brought with them from Somalia, as well as the environments that respondents

encountered in the receiving societies. My analyses illustrate that previous political experience is a factor in explaining the respondents' current political involvement as well as sensitivity to the new discrimination faced in their host countries.

### **Transitioning to Democracy: First Generation**

In several respects, the dynamics of political participation by first generation respondents in Minneapolis and London were similar. First generation diaspora women do not agree with much of the American and British cultural practices, as they contain a number of elements that conflict with their traditions and values. But when it comes to politics, this group believes that the democratic process, with its electoral participation, is a custom worthy of adopting.

Most of the existing research about immigrant women and political participation is concentrated on women who migrated from countries ruled by governments with political parties and electoral systems (Hardy-Fanta, 1993; McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2011). To the contrary, the majority of the first generation Somali respondents stated that they never had the opportunity to vote in a political election before moving to Minneapolis or London. Somalia before the civil war was ruled by a military dictatorship (Samatar, 2007). Thus, citizens were denied free speech and the opportunity to democratically challenge the Supreme Revolutionary Council, the president's political party. With the civil war and the fall of the government, any type of political participation became an impossibility. Hence, for diaspora subjects, being part of a political system that allows its citizens to vote according to their own interests has been remarkable and challenging after having experienced years of authoritarianism and anarchy.

Ardo, from London, praised the UK's democratic electoral process and stated, "I wish we had this peaceful political process where we respect each other and value people's opinion instead of clan belief. This would have saved our country" (Ardo, London).



Halimo, communicated her excitement at being a first-time voter and marveled at how voting in Minneapolis appeared orderly at the polling station. She stated, “I was impressed how voting proceeded calmly. I was expecting to see soldiers with guns guarding the polling station...if I could, I would package and ship this [system] to Somalia ...you know, back home politics is dealt with guns” (Halimo, Minneapolis).

Women like Halimo and Ardo who have experienced war’s trauma prioritize peace and security, and they consider these to be values and rights of citizens in a democratic society. In spite of praises for the peaceful political practices in these locations, these first generations respondents’ adjustment to electoral political participation appears to be an uphill battle.

It was apparent from their comments about political participation that these respondents had a very narrow definition of what that meant. To them, it was something belonging to the established institutions and involved managing political campaigns or running for office, which they did not do. This was evident from their contradictory responses. For example, in answering the question “Do you participate in politics?” first generation informants replied “No.” But with the follow up question “Do you vote?” respondents declared “Yes.”

The respondents’ contradictions regarding political participation arise from a combination of factors, including their negative experience with what results from politics (i.e., civil war), their lack of social capital and the impact of discrimination. In addition, the respondents hold tightly to the remnants of Somali traditional culture, which undermined women’s leadership capacity.

These lingering cultural habits and experiences hinder women of this generation from directly engaging in politics. For my respondents, the first factor listed above is the most prevalent, as women of this group profess to distance themselves from politics, which they

equate with killing and destruction. However, much of the involvement respondents reported can be placed under the rubric of political participation, even though they would not recognize it as political participation in either the electoral or nonelectoral arenas. Instead, they are comfortable in identifying their activities as “community issues” work because this framework provides them a refuge where they can feel comfortable and safe from the toxicity of politics, while still being engaged in activism. Lastly, respondents indicated that their social networks and the impact of discrimination influence the ways they explore democracy in the diaspora locations.

Research on immigrant women and political participation show that defeating racism and stereotyping are the primary reasons minority women engage in politics (Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Read, 2007). My study similarly suggests that fighting discrimination plays a central role in the respondents’ political interest and participation. Respondents shared that they voiced their discontent at the ballot box and through other unconventional activism methods.

Inspired by Hardy-Fanta (1993), in this study I make a distinction between conventional political participation—such as voting, membership to political parties and involvement in political campaigns—and participation in unconventional politics, including volunteering in social justice groups and networks, community-based organizations and religious groups. In this chapter, unconventional modes of political participation, or what the respondents refer to as “community issues,” include neighborhood surveillances and women’s network building for both material and nonmaterial support. In the next section, I will analyze respondents’ accounts of conventional political activity. In exploring this activity, I found differences and similarities between the London and Minneapolis respondents.

## **Conventional Politics in London**

Electoral politics is not the only indicator of political engagement, but it is the one that has received the most attention (de Rooij, 2012). Voting is important because it is a way to make one's voice heard and it symbolizes access to political power. Marginalized groups use the vote to further social equality and move their representatives into positions of political leadership (Verba, 2001).

Studies of immigrants and political participation highlight that eligible immigrants do exercise their electoral right, and in some communities, women outnumber men in the voting practice. For example, McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011), in their research on Colombians' political participation patterns in London, revealed that more women than men were engaged in voting. As for what sparked Columbian women's interest in British politics, McIlwaine and Bermudez explained that Britain offered a better life for the women than their home country.

Existing accounts of immigrant turnout in the United Kingdom show that many immigrants are gaining electoral voice and that Somalis are among those immigrants. According to Ford & Grove-White (2015) the Somali community has some of the highest naturalization rates in the UK, resulting in an approximate 69,000 voters. Somalis "seem strongly motivated to acquire the full rights and protections of British citizenship and as a result possess a strong electoral voice relative to their size" (p.8). This motivation to be heard comes from experiencing various challenges and discrimination, especially due to their Islamic faith.

Read's (2007) research about the political participation of women from Muslim communities suggests that Muslim communities, in particular Muslim women, as their wearing hijab is a very visible sign of Islam, have been moved from the peripheries to the center of

political attention. Now, more Muslim women are engaged in both conventional politics, including voting, and unconventional politics.

My research is not a comparison between Somali women and men's voter turnout; however, my findings suggest that my respondents' voter participation was strong. In contrast to McIlwaine and Bermudez (2011), my respondents did not say that their life has turned out better than they expected in the UK. Instead, in detailing their voting experiences, their discontent with the misrepresentation of Muslim immigrant women was injected throughout their narratives. Many were dissatisfied, feeling that although they were legally British citizens, they were not actually accepted as being British by the majority population. This contradicts their previous account of being satisfied to be guests who hold on to the Somali identity. It also emphasizes that being in limbo awaiting a change in the circumstances in Somalia did not prevent them from exercising their political rights in the UK. The impression was that they were claiming "identity as a citizen of a country without claiming an identity as 'belonging to' or 'being of' that country" (Nagel & Staeheli, 2004, p. 2) and that they wanted to be respected and accepted as such.

Respondents stated that they vote in both municipal and national elections, which is similar to women's voting patterns described in the literature on gender and politics (McIlwaine & Bermudez, 2011; Norris, 2002). As the party of choice, respondents professed to vote for the Labour party, which demonstrates consistency with other immigrants' partisan preference toward the Labour party (Anwar, 1990; Saggar, 1998).

According to Jamilah, she and her friends vote for the "nice party" (Labour party), but she asserted that they don't participate in campaigning, nor have they any intention to run for public office. She said many of them get political information through Somali-based organizations that support the Labour party.

Another respondent, Ardo, said, “I don’t like politics, but after community leaders explained to us [first generation diaspora members] the difference between the Conservative and Labour parties, many women decided to vote for the Labour party because they protect the rights of minorities.” She asserted that during the election, Somali women react against campaign rhetoric that portrays Muslim immigrants as threatening to British social cohesion. It is their vote that they use to counter the discrimination.

The majority of the respondents held the belief that the Labour party supports a soft approach to immigration because, in the minds of these politicians, immigration is an unmitigated economic and cultural benefit to Britain. Many of them were of the assumption that the Labour party has a more sympathetic view toward the refugees’ plight and thus will not introduce hostile policies directed at immigrants and minorities. Jamilah thinks that the acceptance of Somali refugees in Britain in the late 1990s and early 2000s was facilitated because the Labour party held the majority. She said, “If the nice party was not in power in 1998, my family and many other Somalis’ asylum claims would not have been accepted in Britain.”

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw high flows of refugees into Britain (Singer & Wilson, 2006), including those from Somalia. To Jamilah’s point, based on research by Ipsos MORI, the largest number of refugees (37%) who arrived in London gained citizenship between 2000 and 2004, when the Labour party was still in power. Among those, one-fifth were Somali (Ipsos MORI, 2010) who perhaps subsequently were more likely to align themselves politically with the Labour party.

While respondents stated that deciphering London’s political system is arduous and that they had already chosen to support the Labour party, they took time to also discuss the

Conservative party and other nationalist parties. Suada, a single mother, maintained that nationalist parties are fond of telling stories about immigrants and minorities abusing the benefits system or engaging in acts of terrorism. Jamilah noted how Conservative objections are so strong to multiculturalism and diversity that “they are planning to close mosques and restrict Muslim religious rights.” Dahira, a stay-at-home mom, declared, “We are Muslims, and dishonest actions are forbidden for us...it is humiliating to constantly hear that we are terrorist, lie about public assistance and steal welfare money.” All are keen to present the correct image of a Somali Muslim and resent insinuations that being on welfare is part of a lucrative financial scheme for immigrants.

Suada and Dahira mentioned that they have seen anti-immigrant sentiment growing in Britain in the last few years. For example, there has been political gain by the British National Party (BNP), which says that Britishness is disappearing because of all the immigrants (Saggar, 2012).

Dahira further explained that because of London’s growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitude, she voted for Lutfur Rahman in the 2010 mayoral election of Tower Hamlets. Dahira and other respondents felt relaxed and protected living in neighborhoods where South Asian Muslims were the majority because of the absolute ubiquity of Islam in these neighborhoods and the fact that their children would be somewhat secluded from bad influences. Often, they said that without South Asians they would not have the rights to freely practice Islam in London. Thus, for Dahira, voting for Mayor Rahman was doubly gratifying both because he was Muslim and because his win represented the power of the immigrant vote.

In the above accounts of voting methods, respondents highlight the multiplicity of identities that they draw on in their daily lives in order to participate in local elections. This

demonstrates that they are politically aware, although they argue they are not fully involved with the more complex participatory democratic mechanisms and display limited civil engagement and activism, especially on the national level. Jamilah, Dahira and Suada said that they do vote in the national elections and reported that the same Labour party preferences determined their choice of Westminster candidates. Yet they claimed that the general election is too complex to fully understand. This was overwhelmingly agreed upon by other respondents, who viewed general elections and Britain's national political landscape as distant and hard to grasp. However, they clearly stated their unhappiness with how the Conservative coalition was governing Britain (these interviews took place in 2012).

They also understood that different political opportunity exists on the local and national levels. The latter is seen as a complex entity largely revolving around big policy decisions and regulations, while the former is seen as more accessible, tangible and having profound implications on their daily life. This has some similarity with the political view of 1980s municipal feminism, which deemed national bureaucracies as gendered power structures and found it easier to participate in municipal politics because they could promote women's needs within the local authority (Bashevkin, 2011). Feminists also point out that women find it easier to participate in unconventional politics rather than conventional institutions (Harrison & Munn, 2007; Lister, 2003). My findings suggest that unconventional activism has become the major channel for my respondents.

### **Unconventional Politics in London: Neighborhood Surveillance Against Police Brutality**

Feminists have long argued against the tendency to conceptualize political engagement narrowly in terms of conventional activities, such as participation in formal organizations and

voting. They have pointed out that women do not participate less, but rather, they participate differently (Lister, 1997).

According Hardy-Fanta (1993), if scholars explore how different people define and experience community, they can understand why for some people community is important for political consciousness and political practice. She asserted that Latina women gained their political experiences by building community and participating in community activism.

My study is in agreement with Hardy-Fanta's suggestion. For many first generation respondents, the community functions like a filter through which desirable political engagements are expressed. This is because the concept of community as a locus of the individual is found both in Somali traditional culture and Islam. Muhubo, articulated a sense of responsibility and agency to take part in the "community issues." She regarded her protest activities as community involvement, not political actions. Muhubo remarked:

Politics has never been a priority for me. When my children were still little, my focus was how to feed them, and when they got to teenage years my concern was to protect them from bad things and unfair police arrests... also in the UK, political participation is demanding. You have to have time and know many things like the language, the political process, which candidate to vote for, what is the difference between various elections and how these will affect us. Plus, the UK's marginalization system does not help. Instead, it inculcates us with a sense of inadequacy. When my friend and I meet to discuss the *hagbad* terms, we also talk about community issues like problems with police, collecting money for needy individuals and housing problems (Muhubo, London).

Many respondents spoke candidly about how the police quickly label Muslim young men as thugs or terrorists. They had noticed that young Somali men were being disproportionately targeted by the police in their neighborhood. Muhubo indicated that her *hagbad* group (for more on *hagbad* group see Chapter 4) decided to take matters into their own hands by setting up community block surveillance. The intention of this effort was to monitor police actions, such as the unjustified stop and search of Muslims in general, and particularly Somalis, in the borough



where she lives. Then they report the police actions to Somali news channels. To explain why they alerted Somali news channels and not British news outlets, Muhubo said the British mainstream media, like BBC, are discriminatory and biased on immigrant issues. Muhubo said unfortunately their attempt did not last long, as women of their age do not endure the cold weather well and they also feared for their safety. She said:

In summertime, it was easier for women of our age to sit outside our housing flat or walk around the neighborhood, but with cold and rain it became hard to wander outside. And also we noticed outsider people coming with cars to our neighborhood, probably to do dangerous business, and we felt unsafe. (Muhubo, London)

When this tactic did not work, Muhubo and other respondents like Ruqiyo, a mother, and Jamilah reported that they organized a protest outside the police station with the help of a community organization in their area. They wanted to publicly voice their concerns about racial profiling. According to these respondents, they and around 20 people held a peaceful protest. Muhubo, Ruqiyo, and Jamilah asserted that since their interest in police abuses and brutality became public, other organizations notified them about antipolice demonstrations and protests scheduled in other areas of the city. Interested respondents reported that they were unable to join those protests because of the time involved and the high cost of transportation. Muhubo said, “I want to join as many protests against police brutality as I can, but am aware that the change we want won’t happen soon.” Muhubo understands bringing about this change will be a long process. She must factor in the economic cost of her political involvement. She continues: “So I choose which protests I can afford to attend.”

It is evident that in this case, distance imposes the heaviest burden to respondents’ political efficacy. Building coalitions with other protesters is affected by London’s high cost of transportation. Since these respondents are unable to participate in many of the protests that are covered by the national media and measured by scholars who study citizens’ presence in

demonstrations, the extent to which Somali diaspora women participate in local politics is understated. There is also no measure of the ways in which the networks alert women in areas where the protests are being held, as well as where it would be cheapest for locals to attend.

Regardless of difficulties, the respondents continued in resisting discrimination and stereotyping that they or other community members experienced, and this was not passively expressed. As I explain in the next section, when respondents struggled to find safe and well-maintained housing for their large families, they took another activism stride by bringing public attention to this matter.

### **Politics of Housing: London**

Pardo (1998) suggested that there is a minority women's activist tradition that is multifaceted and has clear political implications. She asserted that this activism allows minority women excluded from traditional politics to carve new spaces in which to struggle for civic, cultural and political rights, and in the process, challenge the conventional meaning of inclusion. This section maintains that the respondents are part of this tradition through their public housing activism. Their acts are fundamentally political because any public action adopted by the respondents illustrates and contests the asymmetrical relationship between powerful governmental institutions and powerless low-income public housing tenants.

Housing policies are considered gendered as they are fraught with oppression and class discrimination. That is, women generally have much lower earning than men because they are the primary caregivers of children, often limiting their participation in the paid labor force. Thus, the economic position of women makes them among the most disadvantaged in the access to adequate housing. This is particularly relevant for racial minority and immigrant women who also suffer discrimination in employment and have higher risk of poverty. According to

Goldberg (2009) “[i]n the UK, women of color have much higher poverty rate than white women, and this is the case among all family type” (p: 250). For these low income women housing policy influencing the distribution of housing benefit is important as access to affordable housing offers safety and wellbeing for their family. However, many of the respondents who accessed or attempted to access more affordable housing identified numerous barriers and discriminations with administrative and bureaucratic processes that were hostile.

Zaynab, a mother of six and part-time student, and Cadar, an active woman who used to be a midwife in Somalia, both talked about the demonization of immigrants by some of the housing authority officials and consistently misrepresented by the media. Cadar said, “When we were new and unfamiliar with how the system works and our rights, the housing authority took advantage of our situation, and they would find a little excuse to evict families.” Zaynab also talked about the negative attitudes of public housing officials towards migrants:

One day I went to the housing office with a friend to swap home. When we told to the worker our plan, she said with rage in her voice this accommodation is on hold because immigrants misused it and caused violations of the housing authority’s regulations (Zaynab, London).

People who live in social housing in London are allowed to swap their quarters with another tenant if they follow certain rules and get permission from the housing authority or their landlord. In the quote above, Zaynab is claiming that her opportunity to benefit from an accommodation that was afforded to other individuals vanished because of discrimination on the part of the worker who assumed all migrants would be likely to misuse the accommodation because of a few instances of misuse. Moreover, Zeynab and Cadar indicated that the media and politicians often draw a connection between immigration and the housing crisis. Cadar remarked, “I noticed when there is news about the housing shortage, they show immigrants in

line in the housing office and Muslim women with children in tow. They are telling the audience these are to blame for housing crises.”

According to the respondents, Muslim women’s visibility and non-Muslim invisibility helped to further concretize the specific religious, ethnic, and gender image of the “dependent” citizen. Depicted as passive, breeding welfare recipients, Muslims immigrants essentially became the embodiment of the calamitous public housing system and a problem for social cohesion. Ironically, these respondents’ attempts to attain dignity and basic necessities and to improve their life conditions by demanding that the housing authority treat its clients with justice sharply contrast this weak caricature.

The respondents’ activism reflected desire to be citizens like everyone else and acquire decent, safe, and sanitary homes for their families. In doing so, they are engaging in equalization strategies with universalistic salience. For example, Amran, an activist for affordable housing and part of a Somali women’s network, mentioned that her group pursued the issue of family size and council housing in East London. She maintained that while Britain’s officials are aware of the Somali family size, they are not assisting them to find adequate affordable housing. Amran stated that they want to live in East London because of its diversity, but their housing needs are not being met. “Everywhere we go the answer is ‘We don’t have enough rooms for your family size.’ Then my question is how we are supposed to make [a] home in London when we cannot find houses.” It is interesting here that Amran is trying to make a “home in London” yet still professes the imagined home is Somalia. It seems that home can be multiple places. One can see Amran’s allusion described in Ahmed’s (1999) discussion on the symbol of home and its different references.

To Amran's point, one needs a domestic dwelling in order to feel at home and the Somali community is struggling to find accommodations that enable large families to live together. Amran must follow policies tied to the immigration and welfare systems that regulate the ratio of bedrooms to the number of family members. She indicated that for a long time the problem was viewed as acculturation and the solution, in Amran's words, was for "Somalis to stop having so many children and go against Allah's willing...that is what happens when you have the government in your personal life." Amran's argument about the right to have large families is close to Spivak's (1996) observation regarding developed countries' policies that regulate immigrant women's reproductive rights. She stated that a woman's reproduction is "tied to so-called aid packages..." and that "the policy is no less than gynocide and war on women" (p.246). Amran continued in saying that recent complaints from many community leaders and other mothers, including those in her *hagbad* group and from the borough, have caused the housing problem to be addressed as a human rights issue. Amran said with surprise, "Now that I am talking about our efforts, I realize we now know a lot more people and are more aware of discrimination and social equality, and we [women] really changed both ourselves and the situation."

Amran's stories tell about the propensity of the British mainstream to reduce Somalis to being an "invisible community" (Harris, 2004) or being labeled as docile bodies "in which people become the effect of a discourse which consequently denies them agency" (Takhar, 2013, p. 89). Being described as having difficulty adapting is an excuse from the mainstream for nonacceptance. More importantly, it confirms, as did other respondents' accounts, that this collective identity caused women to be intimately intertwined with the desire for agency. Yet in telling these anecdotes about their achievements, abilities, rights to maintain traditional culture,

organization, and advocacy on behalf of women, these respondents and others never described it as activism or being political. They spoke of their efforts in terms of it being a mother's responsibility. As history shows, this housing struggle and subsequent community building between mothers is not peculiar to only Somali women.

For example, Williams (2004) wrote of similar struggles with the public housing system in American cities experienced by low-income Black women. Williams argued that these struggles forged strong networks of activists among the public housing residents. The Black female residents in these public houses responded to and influenced public housing conditions and legislation on the local, state, and federal levels. Williams highlights that the acts of these women were community activism and suggests that all community activism is political.

Spence and Stephenson (2009) explored the patterns of activism by miners' wives, sisters, and daughters following their epic struggle against the pit closures in the 1990s which caused economic devastation to their community. She reported that despite women mobilizing into action, undertaking a range of activities which confronted the economic disparity and abandonment as well as participating in riots against the government and the mining companies, they never considered any of their measures to be political work. The women involved referred to their efforts as community action. According to Spence & Stephenson (2009), the reason the women did not want to associate their activism to politics was to emphasize that their battle was a grassroots commitment to save their lives, not merely a political campaign. They concluded that the collective action served to change the social relations through which people defined themselves. Thus, it inadvertently changed women's role in the community and gave the women confidence in themselves as agents of change.

Werbner (2005) discussed the strength that women contribute to the Pakistani community in London both in the private and public domains, even though they are portrayed as vulnerable and submissive. She highlighted how Pakistani women demonstrated their role in caring for their community by being explicit in their words and actions against the harsh legal punishment of the young South Asian men who took part in the Bradford riots. Women organized protests, and with support of attorneys, they initiated the “Fair Justice for All Campaign” (p. 763).

From the analyses of my respondents, the miners’ wives and Pakistani women, it can be deduced that people's politics are often shaped by aspects of their identity, such as class, ethnicity, and gender. Feminists advance the idea that discourses about identity politics can foster social, political, cultural, and other types of transformations for women (Pateman, 1989), and postcolonial feminists profess the need for a common background struggle to constitute women’s political identity (Collins, 2000; Hook, 1999). Then it is possible to argue that because the respondents share common experiences of civil war and resettlement struggles, they subsequently constructed, without even planning, a gender-based political identity.

### **Conventional Politics in Minneapolis: Politicized Community**

A distinction between the communities studied is that the Somali are the largest Muslim population in Minneapolis while in London they are only a part of an established Muslim population. Therefore, any incident involving a Somali person in Minneapolis makes him or her stand out as both Somali and Muslim, an indication of the impact of ethnicity intersecting with religion.

In 2008, a young Somali Minnesotan, Shirwa Ahmed traveled to Somalia and made headlines by “infamously becoming the first American suicide bomber” (King & Mohamed 2011, p. 1). This sad and violent occurrence prompted the Department of Homeland Security

(DHS) to conduct extensive investigations of the Somali community in Minneapolis. People were arrested for suspected affiliation with terrorist groups. Feelings of alienation began to grow in the community.

In 2012, two Somali women were accused of voting fraud. The charges stated that they voted twice in the same election, once by absentee ballot and a second time at a polling place. Authorities were almost certain they did not understand the regulations surrounding voting. A sense of insecurity caused these first generation voters to seek help in voting, which sometimes led to their role as pawns in voting fraud at the polls.

One year later, two other Somali women from Rochester, a city that is about 80 miles Southeast of Minneapolis, were imprisoned for providing financial support to an Islamist terrorist group in Somalia. This highly politicized context, wherein the media focuses on the Somali community and local and federal security agencies have investigated Somali businesses, motivated Somali Minnesotans to develop their political significance. While activism is more evident in younger generation respondents, the older generation made clear that they are intimately conscious of the othering and stereotyping that occurs. Just like their Londoner counterparts, they respond to this through the leveraging of their vote.

Informants from Minneapolis talked about their experiences voting in both local and national elections. Compared to London's respondents, the women from Minneapolis did not reveal any difficulties in understanding the national politics, and this is because of the relative straightforwardness of the American two-party system. Shacni said, "I am not involved in politics, but I voted from the date I obtained my citizenship in 2006... and in 2007, I voted for Keith Ellison, the Muslim congressman. In 2010, I gave my vote to Hussein Samatar, and in 2008 and 2012, I voted for President Obama" (Shacni, Minneapolis).



The political candidates that Shacni voted for are all from the Democratic Party because the majority of Somalis in Minneapolis consider the Democrats to be caring when it comes to immigrant issues. This view was shared by Jawahir who, along with her friends, cast votes for the Democrats because they had been sensitive to the challenges facing new Americans. She explained that when the Somali community has concerns related to education and remittances, it is the Democrats, like Keith Ellison, who stand by them and demand the respect of their rights.

Jawahir mentioned that the Democratic Party does not support major cuts to the welfare system and that the Democrats are more willing to take on issues between the community and law enforcement. She claimed that as a result of challenges brought to elected officials, the city has hired Somali-American police officers to reduce tension between law enforcement and the community. Other respondents stated that at election time, they are helped by Somali-based organizations who work to organize minorities into a politically cohesive unit and explain to them the benefits that a Democratic victory would have for the community.

The respondents expressed their satisfaction in voting for the Democratic Party. This is a trend similar to the voting of other immigrants and women overall (Norris, 2000; Norris & Ighberhart, 2002; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001). Gender differences in party preferences and women's alignment with the Democrats have prompted studies by scholars (Norris & Ighberhart, 2002) who argue that one of the topics that polarize the two American parties is the issue of women's rights. They assert that the Democratic Party has positioned itself as supportive of policies that benefit the expansion of social, political, and economic roles for women. Respondents affirmed that the issues that they care about, such as education and welfare, are more accessible because of the Democratic Party's treatment of these women's

issues (Norris, 2000). This demonstrates that respondents are aware that public policy is gendered and men and women are affected differently.

It is important to point out that although respondents conveyed their preferences toward the Democratic Party, the women expressed their struggle with some of the Democratic Party's ideologies that challenge their religious values. They expressed discomfort with the protection of abortion rights and the quest for the legitimization of same-sex marriage. Halimo, the most cautious among the respondents, said: "Marriage for us, Muslims, is between a man and a woman, and as long [as] this law will not interfere with my family and won't force me to change my belief, I don't care...I ignore it." This group generally takes conservative positions on social issues but holds liberal views on fiscal issues because they spent most of their adult lives under socialist government rule. This may help explain the challenges that respondents experience when it comes to being in full agreement with the Democratic Party's vision.

More interesting than the choice of party was the respondents' reason for voting; based on informants' responses, one would assume that the efforts by community-based activist organizations to develop voter literacy had been effective. They were able to persuade the respondents to participate in politics by voting and communicating their needs to those political officials who presented a platform that coincided with their views. However, this group's perception of political participation was somewhat different from what is considered traditional in the US and Britain. Voting is one of the most fundamental rights of democracy that citizenship guarantees to immigrants (Lister, 1997; Norris, 2002). However, for first generation respondents, voting was not merely political activity. It also more importantly presented an opportunity to conform with social participation expectations and allowed this group to feel a bit more included in the Minneapolis and London communities.

An analysis of the interviews also led me to discover a nonpolitical reason to vote, one that I had not thought of before embarking on my research. So before I move to Minneapolis respondents' unconventional political participation in the next section I will discuss this important finding.

### **Culture of Respect by First Generation: Everyone Votes**

In the introduction section, while Ardo and Halimo recognized the benefits of the democratic process, they also asserted that their understanding of American/British politics is still a work in progress. This was most evident in their conceptualization of voting as an instrument through which they practice social conformity to the community in which they reside. Zaynab, put it this way: "No, I don't participate in UK politics, but I vote because [the] majority of British people vote, and [the] UK is where I live and the country where my children were born. I am a citizen and member of the community, so I too have to vote."

This implies that Zaynab's voting provides her a platform to initiate social connections. For her, voting is linked to a conscious choice to be part of the community where her children were born and toward social inclusion for herself and her children.

The words of Ardo were similar: "Political participation is not for me, but I vote because I am a British citizen and voting is an important social practice in the UK." Other respondents expressed similar thoughts as to the social conformity that voting offers. Fadumo, from London, in sharing why she votes, stated:

I vote because it is typical of here...London election time always people ask you if you vote, and if you say no they will take time to explain about the value of the right of voting. Candidates ask you to vote for them through television or coming in person to our community center, and without even realizing you became just like them [British] and all you think about is how to vote and when to vote, even though all is unfamiliar to me (Fadumo, London).

Regardless of geographic location, first generation respondents saw voting as a social practice and not just political expression. This is reinforced by Arwa's explanation of how Minneapolis' mood surrounding the election influenced her own voting attitude. The atmosphere that Arwa referred to did not come from canvassing by ethnic organizations and political parties that encourage new citizens to be full participants in civic and political life (Jones-Correa, 2013; Ramakrishnan, 2013) and hope to eventually influence their vote. But rather she was responding to Minneapolitans' social norms and expressions of voting. She said:

In Minneapolis, it is hard not to notice that there is an election going on...it is almost a celebration. Everyone is excited and nervous. Voters after they voted to show that they care wear an 'I voted' sticker. Political programs on television are long...like T.V. shows...I don't understand all of what they are talking about, but it is different and interesting. There are posters everywhere. I remember in Somalia the only propaganda posters allowed were President Siyad Barre, Lenin and other communist leaders' posters. Here you see different posters and different candidates. People spend time and money with voting because they value voting...so I have to vote because if I don't vote I would feel disrespectful to all of those who care about voting and the country that welcomed us (Arwa, Minneapolis).

Arwa's description of her voting experience confirms the theory that voting has a habitual component (Green et al., 2002) and that by conforming to this practice, respondents are building a habit of electoral participation and adopting a social norm. Nevertheless, it is essential to make a fundamental distinction when talking about conformity here because adopting the voting practice is not related to assimilation (Huntington, 2004). Rather, it is part of selective social practices (Ozyurt, 2013) and participation in rituals that may nurture shared experiences with the host country.

Based on Arwa's political background, culture, and inexperience in voting, which is common for this group, she demonstrated that respect and gratitude create a willingness to conform to social practice and expectations: "If I don't vote I would feel disrespectful of those who care about voting and the country that welcomed us." This statement reveals that the

respondents' voting attitude is an act of gratitude stemming from the generosity, acceptance and their reception as invited guests as discussed in the chapter opening quotes. This also indicates the intricate interplay of culture and politics because respect in Somali culture is an important social capital asset with strong norms of reciprocity. When a Somali displays respect toward someone, the same favor is expected in return. Thus, voting is important for this group because of the strong social respect that could be established between them and their host community. However, the respect has not been reciprocated.

Although for many of the respondents the process of formal politics is complex, they demonstrate a capacity to harness optimism, collective orientation, and mobilization. One needs to examine the voting attitude of the diaspora women in a comprehensive manner, being mindful of the obstacles to political integration as expressed by the interviewees, along with their other community involvement.

### **Unconventional Politics in Minneapolis: Protests**

As noted in Chapter 4, community organizations play essential role in influencing respondents' political participation. The findings showed that community organizations create emotional bonds and empower respondents to engage in national electoral politics. As some respondents reported they participated in protests as expressions of grievances, this section demonstrates that community organizations bring certain strengths to the respondents' mobilizations. Yet, while the protests underline the freedom of expression the respondents now enjoy in diaspora locations, it also validates the charge that all is not well in these locations. For instance, the social representation of Muslim immigrants clashes with Western secularism's treatment of religion as private rather than public, and dissatisfaction with that lack of acceptance may become one reason for groups to protest, just like my respondents.

From the beginning, Somali immigrants entering the workforce in Minnesota faced challenges to their religious practices. After several accidents in the workplace, employers asked women to follow a strict dress code calling for removal of the hijab. There was not an understanding of the Somali tradition where there is no “separation between church and state” as exists in America. In other instances, workers were directed to handle products forbidden by Islamic law, such as alcohol and pork products. Elsewhere, workplaces banned prayer breaks and other religious observances. Some respondents reported that they experienced this type of discrimination in the workplace and consequently sought the community organizations’ help.

Arwa and other respondents explained that after the organizations’ attempts to reason with the employers failed, they held protests in front of their workplaces. Arwa, who at one time worked in a Minnesota chicken processing plant, stated that she was underpaid for the difficulty of the work, and when her supervisor told Somali workers that they were not allowed to wear the hijab at work, she could take no more. She said:

Our first approach was to contact the leader of the Somali Community [Confederation of the Somali Community of Minnesota] and ask them to intercede with our employer and explain the need for the following of religious customs for a Muslim. Unfortunately, this did not work out, and we were advised to protest. The community organization called upon other Somalis for support. We protested for days outside our workplace in the bitter cold of December, and we won! The employer stopped discriminating against us and agreed to our suggested compromise. We were to make sure someone could cover our job task while we were in prayer and the total five prayer times did not exceed the accumulated break minutes for the shift (Arwa, Minneapolis).

Others described how the Confederation of Somali Community of Minnesota (CSCM) assisted them in a protest against proposed welfare reforms. Dahabo and Ambaro explained that at a CSCM community event, volunteers informed members that a GOP legislator was proposing a bill that was viewed by many as anti-poor and anti-immigrant. The bill was intended to cut food stamp benefits and restrict the use of food stamps at certain stores including halal markets.

Many of the attendees felt that the bill negatively affected them, especially on the issue of adherence to Islamic law regarding food restrictions. Dahabo asked the Somali community organization volunteers what they could do to stop this proposal. The volunteers explained various potential actions and they chose to protest before the legislative session.

However, they needed transportation and guidance on what to do once they arrived at the state capitol. In Somalia, protest was seen as criminal activity, and many who protested were imprisoned or killed. Dahabo reported that CSCM representatives, as well as people from other organizations, provided her with instructions regarding the rules of legal protest. They gave information regarding the possibility that law enforcement might thwart free public expression and violate their right to protest. They described illegal use of force and how to conduct themselves so as to avoid arrest. Also, CSCM provided them with free transportation to the protest site at the state capitol in Saint Paul. Dahabo claimed that the demonstration was a success because a broad group of protesters showed up. The importance of this protest does not lie in its size, but in the fact that even with little political expertise, these Somali women engaged in popular protests when their religious rights were compromised.

The fact that community-based organizations were able to mobilize the respondents despite their lack of political experience points to the centrality of community and tradition in the respondents' lives. The respondents' attention to cultural traditions and religious rights provided a context for discussing other methods of activism that could be integrated into their ordinary day-to-day activities.

### **Another Type of Unconventional Political Participation in Minneapolis**

By placing diaspora women's experiences at the center of this analysis, fresh insights on the prevailing concepts of political participation are offered. As noted in Chapter 1 the model of

participation that political scientist address centers on institutional contexts of decision-making and negotiations that occur between citizens and their elected or appointed officials (Verba et al., 1995). While feminists propose a model of grassroots activism that extends the political scientist's approach beyond the electoral voting (Lister, 1997; Norris, 2002), often the activities detailed in their model is bounded to acts that take place within the traditional political sphere, which is inherently exclusive. Moreover, liberal feminists approach and strategies are context specific for Western women's political interest and participation. For example, they don't engage the alternative processes that can be used by some immigrant women to articulate grievances, make claims, and possibly achieve change. These uncommon types of participation that challenges or defies government channels or the dominant culture play key role in my respondents' political involvement. For example, Raxo stated:

Women of my age are not equipped for exposure to high demand political participation because we were never given the opportunity. When I was at the refugee camp, I believed that once in Minneapolis I will find a good job and I will be able to raise my children in America, the richest country in the world. Both our imaginations and expectations were very high. But once here, we had to deal with many difficulties, ranging from child protection agencies that wanted to teach us how to raise our children to other agencies that thought refugees from a third world country were not as educated and independent as mainstream women...no matter what the welfare officials or anyone else believe about us, we are a strong community, and we help each other and most of the time figure out solutions for our problems (Raxo, Minneapolis).

Raxo is one of the founders of a women-only Quran group, and she explicitly stated on different occasions that her group collected money and petition signatures for "cultural reasons." She explained that the group collected money to help a mother start a legal suit against the child protection department, as they were trying to place her teenaged daughter in foster care. The idea of removing a child from her mother struck a nerve with the women of her group.

Raxo asserted that with the help of another organization, women participated at school board meetings and communicated their concerns and ideas to the board. One of the ideas



proposed was to have a Somali liaison at the school to explain Somali culture to educators, especially social norms surrounding children and discipline. Such actions are fueled by respondents' motivation as mothers and should certainly be seen as political engagement.

When immigrants move to a new country with different ways of life, there are inevitably conflicts between normative systems and the culture of the new citizens. This is especially true in the areas of domestic relations and child discipline. Raxo claimed that when government agencies and law enforcement become involved, it is to force culturally diverse families into "modernity."

The traditional ways become controversial, especially in the schools where mandatory reporters determine physical discipline as abuse and seek legal options against the "uncivilized" immigrants when it would be more effective to engage in dialogue with parents and the community. This is congruent with the assimilationists (Huntington, 2004) who have long used civilization of the uncivilized as a defense in ensuring the hegemony of Western culture.

Some respondents discussed other issues surrounding education that are major concerns for diaspora mothers. Shacni talked about a growing problem of high school dropouts and the families' challenge to deal with discouraging odds against the successful future of their children:

Our children have high aspirations and positive attitudes toward education, but they are in schools where teachers don't care about them, or the racist ones...will denigrate and let them down. If these students had teacher[s] from their own background, they would have done much better (Shacni, Minneapolis).

Respondents asserted that some Somali children are at risk of achieving less than their nonimmigrant peers yet their parents cannot advocate for them because of language barriers. Jawahir explained the difficulties that some mothers have getting involved in their children's education:

All the mothers I know want to have a good relationship with the teachers and other instructional personnel working in the school, but when they request interpreters or Somali liaisons to communicate with them, they are told that due to budget cuts such services are unavailable...so since these mothers cannot communicate, and consequently cannot be engaged in activities that are designed by the school, they are criticized and called lazy and unaware (Jawahir, Minneapolis).

Jawahir's account echoes Hardy-Fanta's (1993) finding about the Boston Public Schools' unwillingness to provide Spanish bilingual staff to the schools and the frustration of Latino parents who witness their children being failed. Hardy-Fanta noted that this did not mute the mothers, who found a way to challenge the school's hierarchical structure.

Similarly, Halimo recounted the time she and other mothers wanted to start petitions for shorter summer vacations. Many mothers found that their children struggled to catch up after summer break because of the lack of English in the home and the unavailability of homework tutors to assist with any assignments sent home over the summer. This is because mothers with limited English cannot help their children with homework. However, in realizing that changing to a year-round school schedule is a very complex matter, they opted to find another way to advance their issue. They began initiatives to open more Somali-run charter schools. The main reason these mothers lobbied for charter schools was because they offer summer homework programs. Halimo and Raxo both added that in 2010, when they learned that a Somali candidate was running for the Minneapolis school board, they worked tirelessly to elect the late Hussein Samatar.

Basra, a mother of two boys both diagnosed with autism, described Somali mothers' advocacy abilities and their concerns regarding the large number of Somali children diagnosed with autism in Minneapolis. She recounted that after the schools classified their children as autistic, these mothers, who had never heard of this syndrome before, demanded support for themselves and their children. They asked for an official investigation to determine the cause of

autism in Somali children because some of them believed it was transmitted through contact with other children here.

Basra stated, with the tone and conviction of a winner, that they secured the attention of the local and federal government and other institutions, including the University of Minnesota and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which conducted a study about Somali children and the autism disorder. Basra emphasized that while the wait for the study's findings will take time, many women were satisfied in their ability to build a coalition and raise their voices. She said, "We are pleased that in Minneapolis there is an organization, the Somali American Autism Foundation, co-founded by a mother that has at heart the issue because of her personal experience" (Basra, Minneapolis). In December 2013, the University of Minnesota released the findings of their study confirming that Somali and Caucasian children have higher rates of autism syndrome than other ethnic populations and that there exists a need for further research to determine the causes of these high rates

In the United States, Pardo (1998) showed how Mexican women demonstrated leadership ability by stepping up and demanding the revitalization of their community and neighborhood. They insisted on better parks, street illumination, recreation and leisure services, and they protested the construction of a prison facility in their neighborhood. She maintained that for Mexican women, these actions were not an excuse to get into a position of political power, but a way to demand their citizen's rights. Latina immigrants' community activism helped to transform the political landscape of their cities, giving issues of race, class, and gender a certain degree of prominence in everyday political life. More importantly, this community activism helped them chart their own gendered political identity. A similar political identity is also

captured as my respondents intensely refuse the stereotyped construction of an uneducated Somali diaspora woman who is unable to navigate Western society.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to review the first generation's political participation and explain how the respondents react when drawn into politics. The chapter found, based on respondents' voting experience and activism, they do participate in both the conventional and unconventional politics of Minneapolis and London. Respondents shared that they participate in local and national elections as well as protests. Women in both locations exhibit similarities in their preferences for political representation, as they vote along liberal lines, and their modes of engagement, as they engage primarily in community activism.

Moreover, both London and Minneapolis respondents demonstrate similar concepts of what constitutes political activity. For most of them, politics means holding a political office and power. Thus, when asked if they participate in politics, their response was no, yet they vote. For them, voting was an activity they do with the community, rather than as a politically engaged individual.

A difference between respondents from Minneapolis and those from London was that women in London felt more comfortable involving themselves at the municipal level or in local politics than in national politics. Reasons given were that they see community activism at a local level as something other than politics and that they are not comfortable with participation at any higher levels.

The chapter demonstrated the intricate relationship between the personal and political in the lives of the respondents. Black feminists have argued that social science conceptualizations of power and political activism often minimize or ignore women's everyday activism (Collins,

1991). Respondents were engaged in community activism and actions that were political because of the power struggle, but that the mainstream would not call political engagement, such as confronting housing issues or advocacy for autism needs. Like many immigrants who are trying to make a life in Minneapolis or London, these respondents have been dealing with governmental agencies that, according to them, are plagued by inept administration and biased officials. But these respondents have not reacted passively to such governmental agencies' discriminatory attitudes. Rather, they devised collective methods toward altering these oppressions.

Religion and culture are the respondents' reference points for any further engagement, and these grounding ideologies help them gain understanding. The chapter found that Islamophobia and racism are proof to these women that they are not yet accepted as citizens. This encourages their deeper involvement in politics as they seek change. The multicultural democracy space in Minneapolis and London is assumed to be a safe environment that provides for religious freedom and opportunity for refugees. In sum, informal politics is more accessible (as well as more meaningful) than formal politics for the respondents and as we will see next transnational practices and politics is another form of unconventional politics/activism that first generation respondents are engaged.

## Chapter 7: First Generations and Transnational Political Involvement

### Introduction

The preceding chapter suggested that first generation respondents are relatively engaged in the politics of Minneapolis/London and that the constraints and opportunities embedded within the political culture of their new country shaped their level of involvement in community activism. The chapter also highlighted the influence of the first generation respondents' homeland orientation, as some of them are waiting for their home country to stabilize so they can go back to their former life and status. This biding of time, however, should not be read as being in a passive and uninvolved state, but as a form of active reflection about the future, a reflection that is a vital prelude to the transformation and renegotiation of gender relations necessary for gender equality, the goal for Somalia that these respondents are aiming for upon their return.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that first generation respondents are engaged in transnational political practices directed at disrupting male domination as well as transnational mobilizations intended to halt certain of the US and UK foreign policies toward Somalia. These are important findings for two reasons: first, as a historically marginalized group, Somali women tended to use indirect strategies to fight for gender equality. By contrast, the respondents in my research talked about taking more direct action against their exclusion from transnational politics. Second, findings challenge the argument that migrant women are not engaged in transnational politics (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998). Therefore, this chapter attempts to add insight to the transnationalism literature from the perspective of gender as it relates to political participation.

The literature on migrants' transnational political participation is inclined to privilege a specific type of political, action (i.e., voting abroad), as the main indicator of transnational

political involvement (Waldinger 2008). But Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2004) have pointed out that transnational political involvement is not strictly circumscribed to a single activity; rather, it can be seen as a social sphere composed of various activities that interconnect national borders. Somalia is still in the process of building a democratic system of one person, one vote, thus the Somali diaspora cannot engage in voting from abroad as even common citizens in Somalia cannot vote. For that reason, my description of transnational political participation includes nonelectoral activities that respondents undertook to influence certain political processes in Somalia. In particular, this chapter demonstrates that public practices such as protests emerge as the most frequent form of transnational political action for these respondents.

In this chapter, I briefly outline the transnational networks and activism of the Somali diaspora as they appear in Minneapolis and London. Because for some Somalis, clan has been a vehicle for group mobilization, the next section describes how the Somali clan system has been influencing the Somali diaspora's transitional politics and its effect on diaspora women. In particular, it shows how Somali men are occupying a large share of powerful transnational political positions. Subsequently, I present the ways in which the respondents are trying to change the transnational clan politics that exclude women from Somalia's political decision-making process. My analysis demonstrates a shift from male-oriented transnational political practices toward a pattern where women can claim a presence. As noted above, this contests the idea of Jones-Correa (1998) and other scholars of immigrant women and political participation, who maintain that women are not engaged in transnational politics. Following up are sections that assess transnational political participation in relation to remittance and its restrictions; and transnational political participation in relation to the US and UK foreign policies toward Somalia.

## **Influential Communities: London and Minneapolis**

Before outlining the respondents' involvement in transnational political activity, it is essential to reflect briefly on the two communities and their transnational perspectives. Both the London and Minneapolis Somali communities consider themselves to be an influential, if not powerful collective, with the knowledge, ideas, and money necessary to contribute to Somalia's political affairs. Using the alternative democratic space in London and Minneapolis, politically active Somalis in the diaspora influence the domestic political processes in Somalia through nonelectoral means. Some members within civil society organizations have been pushing, and sometimes canvassing, for progressive politics, which can help to build a cohesive government in Somalia.

There are committees and organizations based in Minneapolis and London that organize and coordinate conferences, meetings, and political workshops intended to contribute a suitable political model, to offer guidance to politicians, and to advocate for overall reform of Somalia's socio-politics (Kleist, 2008). For example, between 2011 and 2012, several conferences were organized in Minneapolis and London regarding the provisional Somali constitution and sponsored debates analyzing the federal political system. The organizers behind these committees and organizations can be divided into two groups: (a) emerging political elites who consider themselves progressive voices for transformative sociopolitical change, and (b) clannists who desire the continuation of the current clan politics, as well as the formation of a federalized clan political system. The latter group is louder and gets more public attention.

In all of these transnational political activities, gender imbalance in committees and among conference organizers is extreme; thus, diaspora women's participation in transnational



politics becomes a power struggle as they confront and seek the removal of clan ideology and its practices of gate-keeping and boundary-making that exclude women and their political expertise.

### **Clan and Transnational Politics**

Based on data gathered during the interviews and observation, this study suggests that the Somali communities of Minneapolis and London, like other Somali diaspora communities (Horst and Gaas 2008, Horst 2008), are politically engaged in Somalia's politics and state rebuilding process. This transnational political process is based on clan and I suggest is therefore gendered.

As presented in Chapter 2, Somalia's political representation is an intricate issue related to kinship relations, clan territorial control, and the power and size of the clan (Samatar 2007). Somali clan politics is based on hegemonic gender roles (Gardner & El Bushra 2004), that is, political leadership is conferred to the *ragga*, the men.

The Somali clans use gender structures not only in reference to status. They employ such structure when considering agency, talents, assignment of responsibilities, and continuity of clan power and values. Men and women cannot have the same responsibility and power. Women in the clan context are typically excluded from decision-making forums and they are recognized and addressed within the patriarchal structures only as mothers, wives, and sisters (Gardner & El Bushra 2004).

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) asserted that gender interactions prior to migration affected migration resettlements and the ongoing relationship between men and women is related to the Somali clan system. Clan was and remains a patriarchal institution. Traditionally, men have the role of dealing with conflict management, clan reconciliation, and power sharing.

The implications of the civil war and the resettling in new countries exposed Somalis to different political cultures but did not modify the clan's sociopolitical dealings and gender order. To the contrary, because clan became the only viable method for Somalia's distribution of power, it created a condition for clan transnational political practices and the clan system of "old boys' club" became more rigid and exclusionary both in Somalia and abroad.

In the diaspora locations, the clan political identity occurs by means of replication of the clan structure and hierarchy that exists in Somalia. The clan's male leadership can be a single person or a committee of elderly men acting as the clan's representative of traditional leadership. These individuals network with their clan mates and other clan representatives who reside in the diaspora locations and beyond. Women are excluded from these networks.

These clan representatives participate in the selection of Somalia's politicians and lobby for certain individuals from the diaspora communities. Men also control the movement of political remittance. This direct and indirect political strategies (i.e., engagement and lobbying; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003) is done both in clan political circuits and through financial contributions. This latter aspect of the clans has been addressed by other scholars. Horst (2008), in explaining the Somali diaspora of Norway and their transnational political activities, has pointed out how the transnational political mobilizations have been encouraged through political remittance. This reinforces my argument that the Somali diaspora follows the same male dominated pattern for representation and mobilization.

Women, on the other hand, are expected to remain uninvolved in the direct operation of the clan's political affairs. The common notion of activities that women might be especially suited to do within the clan derives from traditional gender roles. Women are assigned duties related to caring, such as humanitarian activities for the regional territories and fundraising for

the clan's political financial support. However, because some diaspora women are planning to return to Somalia, they are getting organized to develop strategies for interacting with the male oriented clan politics and they have an agenda to put forth.

### **Women and Transnational Politics**

Many diaspora women are determined to transform Somalia's unequal and unfair political dynamics. This was confirmed by respondents' frustrations as they believed that they have agency and are capable of dealing with politics, but the clan representatives do not see them in the same light. For example, Amran confided that women's strengths are sought only when there is a need for setting up fundraising events and galvanizing men's power with *buranbur* (traditional women poetry). She asserted that the clan's men are less sensitive to the ways in which gender continues to constrain women and encourages the individual and political oppression necessary to further the agenda of masculine politics.

Halimo commented: "there are very low expectations of women. I can say that the clan expectations don't match our own perception of ourselves. They don't expect us to be in power, they don't expect us to be able to use good judgment." Men doubt women's judgment because of the dichotomy between rational man and emotional woman (Nelson 2009). Added to that is the fact that with exogenous marriage, women have multiple clan affiliations and in the case of a clan power struggle a woman's loyalty to the clan is called into question; will she choose her original family clan or the inlaw's clan?.

Muhubo, from London, in sharing her disappointment about the male-dominated clan politics, brought up the fact that after the civil war, men became more patriarchal and the clan system became extremely segregating. Muhubo's view is relevant and the causes of the change can be found in three areas: First, men, with migration, experienced unfavorable socioeconomic

conditions. The migration process was beset with long waits in refugee camps and disrupted careers which caused jobless men to lose their roles as fathers, husbands, providers, and family heads. Further, the welfare system set women up as the single heads of households, offering financial support to women with children and replacing the man in the home. This created a stereotype of a Somali man who chewed khat, was worthless, jobless, and irresponsible (Harris, 2004), thus destroying Somali men's masculinity. For many this circumstance created a yearning for the past with proper gender division and male led family relations. For these first generation patriarchal men, engaging with transnational clan politics fulfils this purpose as it recreates the status they held back home and gives them ways to perform the role of rightful leaders in the community and in their families. As the rebuilders of their egos, their society and their country, men then feel the need to push the female back into her gender role and make strong demarcation about public/ private sphere. Jones-Correa (1998) found a similar gendered transnational pattern with Latino male immigrants whom, with the intent to reappropriate their masculinity, become more engaged in transnational organizations and politics compared to Latina immigrants.

Secondly, the change in the traditional family due to the increase of single women heading households, which was a deviation from the previous composition of father, mother, and children, affected women and their ability to engage with the clan's informal affairs. Despite the patriarchal nature of clan culture, which denies equal access, women back in Somalia used to employ alternative strategies and personal agency as resistance to patriarchal domination.

Marriage and motherhood were two indirect ways that women could engage power (Mohamed, 1997b) and achieve desired results. A wife and/or mother is more powerful than a single and childless woman because the previous has access to her husband and/or son's power

and thus by affiliation to this power she gains community respect and recognition. As stated above, the diaspora altered Somali gender and social dynamics as more women are single-mother and more importantly young Somali men are less involved with clan politics. This opens an opportunity to a new state of affairs in the diaspora locations and in Somalia.

The third reason for change to the clan system as it became more oppressive relates to transnational political circuits and mobility, which made things more complicated for women as Halimo pointed out in the following excerpt:

We [women] are left here in Minneapolis to raise children alone...while men are traveling back and forth between Africa, Europe and North America with the excuse of rebuilding the country. Even if a woman forges through the clans and enters into politics she will still be limited because of responsibility for children or finding someone that can provide her and family accommodation in the places where meetings took place... those unmarried and without family commitment women when they travel with the same frequencies of men they are labeled as desperate singles in search of husbands (Halimo, Minneapolis).

From the above quote, Halimo revealed the gendered aspect of transnational clan politics where men travel and engage in political endeavors while utilizing the women as campaign fund managers.

Since the start of the civil war there have been 14 peace processes (Elmi & Barise 2006) and other countless intraclan political meetings, which took place in both African and Western countries. In a sense, men have become the nomads of postmodern politics. In crossing transnational space, men often have social capital and networks (other clan members) that allow them to navigate transnational circuits with fluidity and ease just as the countryside nomads, while for women, as mothers and caretakers, the same social capital and network is unattainable. Moreover, Halimo shed light on the view from a masculine culture where women are never seen as capable enough to succeed in politics. Women are still perceived as an appendage of men, and this notion insists that women cannot be both single and competent. Singleness is presented

as a state that women must overcome. But now, as many woman are in this situation, there is no longer blind acceptance of clan perceptions by the respondents.

### **Clan Identity Politics or Muslim Identify Politics**

Besides difficulties and obstacles of transnational politics the respondents have also talked about their strategies to counter the clan's gendered assumptions. "The men may be the political actors but women are the backbone of the society and we will try to make this clear to men because we want to go home and rebuild our country and life" (Ardo, London). The longing for Somalia, which is synonymous with the good life, is a recurrent narrative for this group whose mission has become to find ways to regain that status in the beloved homeland. For this reason, first-generation respondents did not want to fit into this transnational political mold that their clan gatekeepers present. Respondents highlighted their agency and capacity to explore new ways to be involved in transnational politics.

Halimo stated that the women of her clan are struggling with the dilemma of maintaining a clan identity that places them in a lower status or confronting the supercilious claim of clan politics and risk being labeled as Westernized feminists who turn their backs on their culture. This is the classical double bind of women caught between difficult choices: rupture or continuity (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Practically, the dilemma of the respondents was to refuse to conform to a stereotype of female behavior that confines women, which would also mark them as intruders in the men's world; or to celebrate agency while maintaining culture without falling into populist role of "angry feminist."

According to the respondents' narrative rupture as abandonment of the culture all together has been problematic to respondents who want to challenge cultural hegemony. I suggest, especially due to living in racialized societies for these respondents, the Somali culture

became their “security blanket” (Sardinha, 2009). Many women alluded to the fact that throwing out the baby (culture) with the bath water (clan) was not their intention.

Instead they found other ways to beat the double bind. They seek to promote Muslim identity over clan identity or accept clan identity but make changes to avoid the painful cultural rupture because women are the ones who transmit culture to younger generations. This space is not only the site of resistance to the dominant clan, but a starting point for the respondents to engage in individual and collective projects to remap and reconfigure their agency in a process of cultural and political empowerment.

### **Transnational Somali Muslimah**

The first group which I will call, *Muslimah*, believes that Muslim identity can be a site of resistance to the dominant clan power. Muslimah is a cross generational factor as the younger generation also use it as a counterargument to challenge those who claim that Islam is religion that denies agency to women (Zine, 2004).

For this group, however, Muslim identity is not separated from Somali culture; thus, to move past political gender barricades, they draw their agency from the religious tenets of Islam mixed with Somali pride. Halimo stated, “now that we studied the Quran we know that while men and women have different duties women have rights to participate in their society’s wellbeing and Somali society is not doing well.”

Ngunjiri (2013) called the incorporation of culture and religious practice “Somali Islamic feminism” and presents this as a feature of many of the Somali-Norwegian diaspora women she interviewed. Similar to the Muslimah of my study, Ngunjiri’s (2013) informants consider that

progressive politics by and for Muslim women are possible from a “gender-tuned interpretation of the Quran” (p.74) which allows them to challenge clan patriarchy (Zine, 2004).

As noted previously in other sections and in Halimo’s statement above, respondents emphasize studying the Quran, as it empowers them to seek change. They also form women’s networks and gain social capital to their advantages and this allows them to expand “bargaining power within and outside their households and are creating grassroots [sic]” movements (Ngunjiri, 2013, p. 1). Ardo and other respondents’ bargaining confirmed that their network is developed transnationally.

Additionally, gender consciousness filled Muslimah women’s thinking about themselves and the Somali society and nurtured their conception of reform and agency. Ardo said “the Quran teach us to use clan as recognition tool and not as a dividing argument...Islam as wives and mothers gives us power to refuse ideas like clan politics that damages our Muslims fabric.” Muslimah believe that clan has no business in politics. They sustain that clan elders should get back to their original role of representing a morality of group unity (Samatar 2007) because political power based solely on clan sentiments is what tore Somalia apart.

Consciousness of gender differences rooted in Muslimah respondents’ belief in the values of family life and maternity as female experiences, that liberal feminists (Okin, 1999) deemed as restraining to third world women’s entry into social reform and politics, gave Muslimah a powerful sense of collective agency and provided the basis for a female critique of clan politics. Halimo and other respondents shared that they have participated in signing petition drive against Somali elder clans who refused to nominate woman as the MP of the Somali government.



## Clan Womanists

The second group that I call *Clan Womanists* had similar reform goals, but expressed them quite differently as they ready themselves to work within the clan system. The option these respondents introduced was for women to enter into the convoluted transnational clan politics and reshape political relations within the current clan system. Jamilah and other respondents believed their only chance to engage in politics as well as to reform politics is to be ready to take advantage of political opportunities as they become available to them. Women have an unusual opportunity to enter into the clan politics when there exists no pool of eligible men to nominate as representatives. The clan gatekeepers, in order to not lose that seat, will consider women as possible nominees. The clan power sharing in the government consists of the number of seats allocated to each clan and those aspirant women with name recognition or those that are visible in the community through their conservative views will stand a better chance of nomination.

Clan womanists part company with opinions of some Western feminists (Childs et al., 2005; Lovenduski, 2005) who subscribe to the notion that feminizing politics and advancing women's political opportunity is better done within the status quo system. Central to this idea is that if women have presence in the current system order they will be able to take certain courses of action, introduce policies favorable for women's empowerment, and dismantle existing institutional barriers and biases (Lovenduski, 2005). While the political opportunity in which Childs et al. (2005), Lovenduski (2005), and nomad womanist respondents are operating is totally different, it is worth pointing out the similarity of the women's political ambition, strategies, and interest in making changes.

Clan womanist respondents disagreed with the bigotry of clan governance. It is important, however, to note that the changes that womanists are proposing to make are in

women's political representations and not in the clan patriarchy chiefdom which they do not view as entirely negatively. Jawahir from Minneapolis addressed this and she said

Women are not challenging the clan social unity and its traditional chief male authority because chiefly it is hereditary position passed down onto the clan's male descendant... we don't want to replace our sons and husbands because that is our culture we respect our men...maybe the next generation will challenge that, but we believe that women can participate to other positions (Jawahir, Minneapolis).

Jawahir's above quote indicates how changes in the clan social order in modern Somalia, particularly with respect to women, are far more complex than it first appears. Regarding government political ambitions she talked about her sister's plan and vision. She said her sister, Aaliya, is known as the "Mama" of the clan. Whenever there is need for financial contribution, support to fill an event space, or protest against a rival clan's governance, her sister is the person to go to as she always delivers. She commented on Aaliya being part of Quran and hagbad groups which helped her to build a network of women in Minneapolis. Jawahir said her sister is trusted by her group and when Aaliya asks for help from her group with semipolitical affairs, such as attending events and protests, they support her. Jawahir explained that her sister and the other women do not agree completely with clan politics, yet being involved in the clan's affairs is the only way women can enter into politics. Jawahir's sister wants to become a Member of Somalia's Parliament and is building a reputation as someone who cares about her clan and community. Jawahir said "if she gets nominated my sister will make changes because she is a woman, a true Muslim, and her morality and integrity will keep her away from injustice and clan power."

Jawahir is expressing her points in paradoxical terms. On the one hand, she is recognizing the men's inscribed role for clan hierarchy and authority, alluding that males deserve higher leadership positions. On the other hand, her previous quotes shows a belief that women are more

moral than men and the Somali society would be better off if only more women were included in the political process. In doing so, Jawahir and other clan womanists are recognizing the male/female dichotomy, yet they are stressing women's moral superiority.

The above discussions suggest the respondents intend to implant their feminine values into the transnational political discourse even if this means not fully conforming to the expectations of the Somali transnational political culture.

However the various aspects of politics and community issues dominated women's effort to come up with approaches to address these issues. Besides the inward orientation of transnational political discourses articulated by the respondents, there were also outward-looking transnational political acts. These include protests and demonstrations directed to some of the American and British financial institutions who do business with Somali remittance companies, as well as demonstrations aimed to influence the host country's foreign policies toward Somalia.

### **Hawala Lifeline for Kin**

In this section, the respondents' discussion of transnational political activism will be situated within remittance issues. Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) argued that "it is impossible to separate economic, socio-cultural or religious transnational practices at either the level of states, migrant organizations or individuals from their political context – and consequences" (p. 2).

Jost (2000) defined *hawala* as "an alternative or parallel remittance system" (p. 5). The *hawala* system is vital for many Somalis because, due to the lack of a formal, functioning public banking system in Somalia, *hawala* is currently the main remittance system used by Somalis around the world. The Somali diaspora is a major source of revenue for the Somali economy and livelihoods through remittances, philanthropic support, and participation in rebuilding efforts (Hammond 2007). What is exceptional about this system is how consistently Somalis wire

significant amounts of money, despite their relatively low income status in their diaspora locations (Abdi, 2015).

My respondents shared that remittance and its regular flow is an important issue for them and other Somalis. All of the respondents stated that they regularly send money to family members and friends who reside in Somalia or in other African countries. According to respondents, supporting family members, friends, and increasingly, larger populations hit by famine, war, and drought, is an act of fulfilling a social duty and familial obligation. Jamilah from London asserted that mutual assistance and solidarity has been the cornerstone of Somali society. Therefore, those who, as a result of migration, have accrued some type of financial, human, or social capital are expected to help the people left behind, both financially and politically.

Halimo indicated that she collected money for a women's organization located in Somalia that needed funds for school uniforms, and she aided a woman seeking a clan nomination to become a member of the Somali parliament. Halimo said:

*Hawala* companies are important to us because, although we are here in Minneapolis, everything that matters for us from our economic, social, political and cultural, are linked to Somalia and in all other countries where we have family members. Often Americans don't understand our culture and collective values... *hawala* money transfer is the only viable way we can support our family, send and receive money to support our life and plans (Halimo, Minneapolis).

Fadumo, from London, echoed to Halimo's view and explained that: "Westerners see themselves as separate from their kin, so they don't take any responsibility toward family members, let alone friends... so for them, wiring money every month to relatives is strange." She concluded her comment by saying "thanks God we haven't changed."

For these respondents, Minneapolis and London are generally seen as locations where people can improve their economic and political ability, but these locations are simultaneously perceived as places of downward social status, infected by individualistic values, and places where people are oblivious to the needs of their extended families (Carling 2008).

Economic remittance is also an example of ambivalent transfer. The literature in this field has amply documented the generosity of the senders and the conspicuous capital transfer made by migrants, but a certain pressure and stigma surrounds the act of sending money and those who fail to remit are labeled as greedy and careless about keeping to traditions and social duty. Therefore, many diaspora subjects commit to sending money to relatives, even if this places a heavy financial burden on them (Abdi, 2015).

All respondents reiterated the expectation of the sense of altruism, morality, and duty that diaspora members are expected to have. For Ruqiyo and Dahira, also from London, remittance is essential for a large segment of the Somali population because it provides them with resources they require to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities, as well as to open and sustain small businesses, pay school tuition fees for their children, and invest in their communities. Ruqiyo stated that, without remittance support, the economy of the country would have collapsed long ago, and many Somali would either have to migrate or perish. She mentioned how important the monthly contributions she sends are for the maintenance of an orphanage and a school that other diaspora members built years ago. Dahira highlighted the first generation's transnationality by stating that remittance is the main way that diaspora women are able to participate in the humanitarian assistance, economic development, and the rebuilding of Somalia.

There are those like Dahabo and Ambaro who, because of their plans to return to the homeland, send back money to invest in a future home. Ambaro shared that she had just come back from Somalia, where she rebuilt her family home so that her ailing mother and younger brother, who is taking care of the mother, could have a place of their own. She added “I am here because I am trying to improve my life and help my family back home. I am the sole provider for my family, I send money every month. Whenever I hear that this lifeline can be closed, I got worry about my family and how they will survive... I want do something about it.” Therefore, a vital political issue for many of the respondents is the challenge to maintain remittance inflows to Somalis where relatives are dependent on the diaspora remittances as Somalia remains politically and economically unstable.

### **Mobilizing against the Closure of the *Hawalas*: Minneapolis Protest**

Writing on the Somali diaspora in Norway and how they are exerting influence on the politics in their home country, Horst (2008) described joining the clan’s fighting army, advocacy, and lobbying and remittances for political reasons as the transnational political activities practiced by Somali Norwegians. She explained that during a conflict between two clan factions, some of the clan members were mobilized to send collective remittances to be used in the form of defense assistance and military operations to protect their clan. In contrast to the mobilization that Horst recounts among the Somalis in her research, my respondents suggested that they are engaged in remittances that are humanitarian, as opposed to remittances for conflict purposes.

According to Orozco and Yansura (2013), the Somali diaspora members remit approximately \$1.3 billion to Somalia. Such substantial amounts of capital inflow demonstrate how remittances are critical not only to families of the respondents, but to the economic growth of the country. It also helps scholars to understand the politicization of remittances and the

devastating effects that a discontinuation of Somali remittances would likely have on Somalis as the *hawala* services are hanging by a thread.

Concerns that remittances are being used to support terrorism were raised in the wake of 9/11 (Abdi, 2015). The real problem, however, came to a head in early 2011, as the Somali-American money transfer operators (MTOs) began experiencing regulatory challenges due to suspicions that some MTOs were exploited by terrorist groups who were presumed to use their transfer services to wire money abroad (Orozco & Yansura, 2013). For that reason, American and European banks opted to stop providing services to *hawala* organizations because the banks are now held accountable for the MTOs' transactions.

Qaali claims that the closing of the *hawalas* is just a pretext to shut down Somali businesses and destroy a thriving community. She blamed the media: "they [the media] are against us... all they do is negative portrayal of Somalis and our businesses." While there is no proof that the media are intentionally targeting the Somali community, Lindley (2013) asserted that Somali *hawala* have often been "presented in the media and the financial and law enforcement worlds as, at best, vulnerable to use for illegitimate purposes, and at worst, expressly designed for illegitimate purposes" (p. 43).

When financial institutions such as Wells Fargo (USA) threatened to close the *hawala* accounts, the Somali community reacted. Many Somalis, including women, protested on the streets of Minneapolis, demanding that the American government intervene to stop the closure of the Somali money service business (MSB) accounts<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "Somali groups suspend wire transfers from Minnesota". <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-remittances-idUSTRE7BT01F20111230> ; "Minnesota Somalis protest cutoff of money transfers ". <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2011/12/30/somali-hawala>

Rather than a march at the nation's capital, the protest against the closure of the *hawalas* took place in Minneapolis, where thousands from the Somali diaspora work and reside. Qaali, Shacni, and Daleys asserted that, if Minneapolis' protests and the various appeals did not work, they were ready to go to the nation's capital. Daleys said "I protested in Minneapolis and I will do whatever it takes to save the *hawalas*, even if that will require protesting outside the White House."

Jawahir from Minneapolis said "when I heard that they were planning to close down the operations of Somali remittance companies, I really got mad because my family and relatives depend on remittance money. If they close the *hawalas*, how are thousands of people that rely on money we send them supposed to survive?" Jawahir shared that she protested and participated in a peaceful demonstration alongside leaders from humanitarian, Somali, and other minority organizations, demanding to keep the only channel many immigrants have to send money to loved ones open. She remarked that she and other female business owners decided to boycott the banks, Wells Fargo and US bank, if they continued to curtail their business with the Somali money-transfer organizations. Jawahir said "we are going to do businesses only with banks that accommodate our needs."

Other respondents tested the power of protests. Ambaro recalled how hard she worked to recruit more women for the protest; she noted that her friends were at first afraid to protest, but after she assured them that the demonstration was assembled by Somali organizations, they agreed to join the protest. She said: "The truth is, we were emotional. Some of us cried and a lot of non-Somali people honked their support to us and our families back home. Our protest worked and the closing of the *hawalas* were put on hold."



Basra, who also participated in the protest, pointed out that many Somali women are not given to loud or confrontational politics, and when they do get involved it is because the cause is worthy: “we [women] usually don’t like to get involved into politics because we see how men use it negatively and divides us, but when it comes to Somali cause, surely we will use everything in our power.” According to Basra, the protest was not the only action the women have taken: They contacted their local politicians, such as the US Rep. Keith Ellison, and requested them to take the lead on the issue of the Somali money transfer system. The demonstration and the women’s constituency demands were effective, as Rep. Keith Ellison and his colleague, Erik Paulsen, later introduced The Money Remittances Improvement Act 2012 (H.R. 6637), demanding the elimination of regulatory barriers to remittance money<sup>2</sup>.

The visual effect of the protest was strong, as it showed women and elderly holding compelling signs<sup>3</sup>; therefore, the Minneapolis protest was followed by the protest action of Somalis around the world as the Somali language media and social media outlets widely reported on the event. The Somali Minnesotans were, for a time, heralded as champions of human rights. Daleys stated:

I received phone calls across the globe – people from Kenya, Australia and Norway called, encouraging us to protest and take any possible action to be the voice of the voiceless Somalis that depend on the remittance money. Before the protest, I did not realize that I can advocate for my people, being so far away from them (Daleys, Minneapolis) .

Arwa similarly recounted how her relatives in Somalia were proud of her and others from the Somali diaspora, particularly women, and the role they took. She said, “at the protest many

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<sup>2</sup> R.6637 - Money Remittances Improvement Act of 2012 112th Congress (2011-2012).  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-bill/6637/text>

<sup>3</sup> For information about the protest see: “Protest today over closing of Somali money wire accounts”.  
<http://www.startribune.com/protest-today-over-closing-of-somali-money-wire-accounts/136433353>

of us were chanting Somalis in Somalia, they may not have strong government but they have strong diaspora community.” Indeed, respondents often highlighted women’s high moral standards and the caring they show for their people and country.

Transnational loyalty and nationalism are an important reality among first generation respondents, and participants’ responses show diaspora community members’ engagement in long-distance politics. Unequivocally, the respondents’ long-distance politics involves ethnic and nationalist politics; however, their long-distance politics is different from the malicious “long distance nationalism” that Anderson (1998) has identified as dangerous action taken by disillusioned migrants to counter loss of status in their host country, and designed to construct a role for themselves through negative engagement in the country of origin’s politics, which often feeds and prolongs ethnic conflicts back home.

Instead, Daleys and the other respondents are examples of diaspora members engaged in long-distance nationalism of a positive nature, who are working hard to compel the US government to halt the closure of the *hawalas*, a monetary lifeline for many Somalis. This demonstrates that respondents want to be representative of the national population, or be an extra voice to influence circumstances for a society that is of relevance to them (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001). They also confirm Glick-Schiller and Fouron’s (2001) argument that long-distance nationalism does not always mean radical activities; indeed, the actions may include other peaceful political activities, such as demonstrating, lobbying, and monetary contributions.

This activism can also be seen as communicative action through which people from the Somali diaspora express their struggle against the structures of inequality that shape the wider economic and transnational political context. Moreover, for this transnational political involvement, the respondents have used human rights discourses to establish a form of

legitimacy. According to them, the adverse impact that antiterrorism laws and the consequent remittance restriction policies have on poor people with a weak government undermines their ability to function in daily life. As seen in the next section, this aspect is also important for London respondents.

### **Human Rights Violations over Closure of Remittance: Getting Ready for Mobilization in London**

Following the American bank's lead, in early 2013 the British bank Barclays announced their intention to end their businesses with the Somali *hawala* money-transfer companies and to shut down their accounts. However, before the bank's announcement, many Somali British, including my respondents, had an intuition that this was coming and were planning accordingly. For example, when I interviewed London respondents in late 2012, some of them were forecasting a big protest in London and, referring to Minneapolis' protest, were talking in the Zeynab world "to do what the Minneapolis community did because they did it right."

As mentioned above, the Minneapolis protest was covered particularly intensively on Somali-speaking media and aired repeatedly by the Somali television news in London and other locations resettled by Somali communities, perhaps as a way to encourage other diaspora communities to take similar actions if/when their local banks decided to terminate their business with the *hawalas*. Therefore, many respondents from London who followed the Minneapolis protest asserted that they were readily able to influence the remittance solution and represent their distant Somali fellows.

Suada and Jamilah, concerned and angry about the possible *hawala* closures, stated that they would canvass their neighborhoods to solicit support, so they could bring thousands of Somalis and non-Somalis into the streets of London, and in Jamilah's words: "when women get

together, good thing happens.” Suada and Jamilah, who were also part of a Somali women’s organization in East London, shared that the organization’s executive director was in contact with other groups interested in staging a big demonstration in London if British banks took action against Somali *hawalas*. They said the executive director wanted to mobilize many people in peaceful rallies and protests to demonstrate to British banks the high human toll of such actions.

Nationalism is central to examining the way that influences “over here” make a difference “over there.” Amran talked about the eagerness of some of the diaspora women to share the struggle of Somalis with everyone and in “every corner of the world.” Her desire to be a representative for the vulnerable Somalis is captured in the following quote:

British people are ignorant about *hawalas* and how important it is for us... when my daughter explained to my doctor that my stress is due worries about the *hawalas*’ closure, she [the doctor] said ‘Why don’t you use Western Union to send money?’... that is what I am talking about: people don’t know Somalis’ situation. We need to engage these people, explain the implications that *hawala* closure would have on our families, that it is human right issues, so if needed they can protest with us and ask the UK government to take action (Amran, London).

Amran, engaging in nationalism discourse, described what she thinks should constitute humans rights and why collective mobilizations should be enacted through humanitarian discourse, which would have a sympathetic effect. What she wants is to enter the public debate in London about the nature of remittance and diaspora members’ relationships with home. Amran stressed how some people are oblivious to the situation of their fellow human beings, and her role in informing them. For the respondents, the discourse of remittance and its solution is wrapped in universal values of human rights. This is an important political move as the humanitarian, life-saving assistance for innocent poor people may subdue the narrative of remittance being used as money laundering and for terrorist purposes.

While Amran's political plan was to appeal to British people's conscience and draw attention to the suffering and rights of her people, others talked about mobilizing and organizing the global Somali diaspora to capture the international community's attention. Fadumo, for example, said:

We will make sure that all Somali diaspora communities around the world organize a global protest, demanding British government to exert pressure on Barclays bank to continue doing business with Somali money transfer services, and I believe this would be effective, and as far of organizing Somali behind the *hawala* issue, it is going to be effortless because money transfer is an issue that affects all of us. This is unjust regulation and we are not going to accept (Fadumo, London).

Fadumo's account points to the fact that, in a globalized world, expansive social connections are an important channel for diaspora to pursue their interest in transnational politics. She is also suggesting that there exists a collective feeling of solidarity, belonging, and agency that is common to the Somali diaspora, from which they can draw a commitment and engagement to transnational political mobilization. Fadumo also highlighted that transnational politics depends on successful framing of a problem and remittance closure appears to be a good reason for all Somali diaspora communities to stand together and challenge the British government and financial entities who deny them their rights to send money to Somalia.

Against the obscured history of Somali women's activism and the paucity of research on immigrant women in transnational politics, the fact that diaspora women would participate in protests and try to take the lead to organize global demonstration for Somali remittance issues is important. Their opinions show us that their transnational protest led them through a process of politicization and a broader analysis of power and poverty. These women's traditional beliefs about family, kinship, and justice served a central role in this politicizing process. Propelled into the public sphere for the protection of their transnational kin, they ultimately challenged governments and financial institutions, striving to demonstrate their agency and, particularly, the

moral superiority of women. However, saving the *hawalas* from closure was not the only transnational mobilization in which the respondents were engaged, as they have also talked about taking part in other protests, such as the US-sanctioned occupation of parts of Somalia by Ethiopian forces and the UK's intentions to intervene in Somalia's political restructuring process.

### **Protest against America's Foreign Policies: Minneapolis Respondents**

In the wake of the antiterrorism discourse after 9/11, the US's adoption of new domestic and foreign policies has been a concern of many Muslims, including Somali Minneapolitans. For example, respondents view American foreign policy in Somalia as having an impact on the welfare of the entire community, inside and outside the homeland. They pointed out that often these policies affect the capability, security, and self-perception of the Somali diaspora in Minneapolis. Basra said "when I am traveling at the airport, I always go through extra screening and several times because of this I missed my plane... I don't complain because I am afraid of repercussion from the law enforcements." Dahabo, in Somalia, remarked that due to weak central government and the fact that human rights organizations do not have offices in Somalia, certain foreign policies, or their unintended consequences, had negative impacts on Somalis. According to Dahabo and other respondents, this is especially true in the most current foreign policy context, dominated by the African military (AMISON) intervention. For this, many respondents indicated that they have served as political conduits to contest American foreign policies.

For example, Arwa and Qaali remembered being among the hundreds of angry Somalis who protested during the 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC) in St. Paul, Minnesota, against the US-authorized Ethiopian occupation of Somalia. Arwa said:

As Somali American citizens, we wanted to express our frustration and indignation with the American government's sanctioning of the occupation of Somalia. We protested in the streets of St. Paul and demanded justice for Somalia. This is the new way immigrants are: we care about where we came from, but when we protested we chanted 'we are US citizens' to warn the politicians that if they don't support our cause and take action on the issue, they won't get our vote. The protest was organized by Somali and that day I felt we were a united community (Arwa, Minneapolis) .

Marked by an extraordinarily emotive sense of nationalism, Jawahir also said that, clad with the Somali flag's color (blue and white), many Somalis marched through St. Paul's streets, demanding that Somalia's sovereignty be respected. Jawahir recalled that some of the protesters showed their allegiances by waving both the Somali and American flags as they marched through St. Paul to show their anger.

The protest to which the above respondents refer relates to an old political issue that is still fresh in the minds of many Somalis. Prior to 2012, Somalia had been without a central government, a political mechanism that is necessary for statehood and sovereignty. Therefore, the country's political status became a concern for many diaspora communities and, while they desired that the West bring aid and stability to Somalia, they were shocked when an invasion was ordered by the US government who determined that the governmental vacuum in Somalia necessitated treating it as a part of the war on terror. In 2006, the US-backed Ethiopian military invaded Somalia and captured the capital, Mogadishu, driving out the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), who at the time had control of most of the country. Large numbers of Somali, both inside and outside the country, opposed the invasion and demonstrated in solidarity with the UIC because they provided the only stability the country had known since the civil war. Moreover, giving a green light to the Ethiopian troops to invade Somalia, on the pretext of removing the UIC from power, was seen as a major mistake by many Somalis, due to the decades of conflict and bad feelings between Somalia and Ethiopia. In the months following the invasion,

international human rights groups, such as Amnesty International (2008), accused Ethiopian troops of killing civilians and committing atrocities. Leaders of the UIC urged Somalis everywhere to rise up against the Ethiopian occupation and defend their country. Some young Somalis from the diaspora, including Minneapolis, responded to the call and joined the fight against the invasion by Ethiopian troops; however, in the West these young freedom fighters were labeled as terrorists (Wise, 2011).

Others, like my respondents, protested peacefully in the streets of many American and European cities to show their disdain for the Ethiopian aggression. From afar and with protests, my respondents expected to influence and consequently change America's foreign policies toward Somalia. When the respondents were asked why they opted to protest, they suggested that they knew that it was going to be impossible for them to achieve political influence through mainstream politics alone. The respondents' attitudes toward political protest appeared to be linked to notions of the expressive performance of anger and of instrumental participation; this shows that respondents have confidence in the potential efficacy of protest actions as means of influencing public policies.

Moreover, political mobilization can come from an established ethnic community that is able to support such political activism (Ong & Meyer, 2004). Indeed, many new and well-established diaspora communities from Ethiopian, Haitian, and Jewish backgrounds have all played important roles in homeland issues and maintain transnational collective politics, particularly on issues of foreign policy (DeWind & Segura, 2014; Glick-Schiller & Fouron 2001; Lyons 2012). This implies that many diaspora communities settled in US have some level of sympathy for and affective ties to their homeland and employ persuasion as they seek to influence US foreign policies towards their people. Somalis can be considered a new diaspora



community in Minneapolis as their settlement dates back to the 1991 civil war exodus (Abdi, 2015); however, based on the participants' responses, the Somali diaspora takes an active role in political processes and values its potential to shape US foreign policies toward their homeland.

### **Protest against the UK's Foreign Policies: London Respondents**

Somalia also became the top of the UK policy agenda because it met the country's foreign policy goals, which were and are centered on maintaining Britain's security and safety as national interests (Mosley, 2012). So, another high-profile demonstration addressed by the respondents was the protest outside Lancaster House at the 2012 Conference on Somalia in London.

As explained in Chapter 2, between 2004 and 2012, Somalia had a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and hence, in 2011, a political roadmap implementing the end of the transitional government was agreed by major stakeholders. Following the roadmap proposal in 2012 were two conferences: one hosted by the Turkish government, and the second by the United Kingdom government, ushering in the end of the Somali transitional government arrangement. Mosley (2012), pointing out the role of UK government in this Somali political milestone, wrote:

The London Conference was a significant development, at least in terms of UK engagement with Somalia. The end of 2011 and beginning of 2012 saw the most sustained and focused UK policy attention to Somalia in the entire history of the civil war. The key aim of the Conference and subsequent engagement has been to improve the coherence of international engagement with Somalia's political transition, and to maintain momentum in bringing the TFC's mandate to a close. (p. 2)

Not everyone within the Somali diaspora community welcomed the London conference and many of them protested because it was deemed to be neo-imperialism at work, with the West competing for influence against Muslim countries.

The respondents who did not participate in the protest asserted that besides the conference's contestations, merit, and outcomes, they perceived the occasion as an avenue to influence the predominant political ideas in London in more subtle ways. They stated that the 2012 London conference allowed them to create a better understanding of their immigration reasons and refugee status with the mainstream British public; during the conference, the media focused on less negative aspects of Britain's Somali community, and thus highlighted the political, economic, and security entanglement that Somalia is experiencing. In doing so, respondents said the media have portrayed them as true refugee subjects and not migrant welfare cheaters. Based on the respondents' reports, this was an argument that has given them more visibility.

Three respondents in my study, Ardo, Cadar, and Fadumo, claimed they were part of those Somali diaspora who opposed the conferences and joined in the protest at Lancaster House because, as Cadar summarizes, the conference advocated the balkanization of Somalia as a means for Britain and other Western countries to control it. The respondents reported that they resorted to protest because it was the only way they could get the British government and public's attention, thus indicating that protest may represent an important aspect of their politics. They revealed that protests are popular because they get media coverage and it shows citizens displaying their levels of frustration and intolerance for injustice. Additionally, they saw the protest as a platform from which they could connect to Somalia and become directly involved in socio-political change within the country.

Ardo's attitude regarding the protest is reflective of this:

The politics of Somalia is run by politicians who see government as a business generating income; they don't care the average Somali and their basic need... we, the diaspora community, who have ways to complain about the situation and the dividing of our

country, we have to get together to keep accountable the international community who is making deals with these self-proclaim leaders, and protest is the only way we can achieve this goal (Ardo, London).

Ardo portrays diaspora as subjects who should galvanize interest and raise awareness among key stakeholders, both in the diaspora and the international community. By operating beyond the borders of the Somali state and its authority, she believes that the diaspora community should attempt to challenge the Somali transitional government's legitimacy and establish formal links with the international actors. According to her, and in accordance with the views of other respondents, protest seems to be a working political resource for diaspora communities engaged in long-distance politics to position themselves as guardians of their country.

As can be deduced from the respondents' quotes, their aim was to pressure the UK government and other foreign governments present at the conference and other nongovernmental international actors to alter their policies towards Somalia. These types of political action and the diaspora's nationalistic orientation regarding long-distance politics are not unique to my respondents. In the previous sections I cited how other diaspora communities established in the US play an important role in the foreign policies of their country of origin. In the UK context, diaspora communities like the Zimbabwean and Tamil, among others, have also been using their diaspora voice and social justice ambitions to engage with the democratization and implementation of human rights laws in their home countries. For example, Pasura (2010) has argued that Zimbabwean diaspora communities in London are active actors in homeland politics, and by directing their opposition beyond the borders of the Zimbabwean nation and its power, these actors bypass state control, confront the government, and delegitimize its leaders. Orjuela (2012), in mapping out the transnational political engagement of the Tamil diaspora, alleged that

transnational political mobilization, particularly demonstration, is one of the political resources used by this diaspora community; however, these authors and other studies on diaspora communities and transnational politics have largely been focused on the nature of the diasporic political imagination by creating a common identity in exile, which would then represent the homeland. One area that has been overlooked in these studies is gendered transnational political practices, which is demonstrated in this chapter.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to broaden our understanding of gender and transnational political engagement, and in doing so it breaks with the common convention of examining transnational politics from the vantage point of men's experiences. The recent literature on immigrant women and their political participation asserts that immigrant women who resettled in the US and UK are not involved in transnational politics (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998; McEwin, 2011) and that transnational politics is a field heavily dominated by men, particularly those who yearn to regain the status and respect they enjoyed in their homeland, but lost in their new country (Jones-Correa 1993).

While I agree that transnational politics strongly influences constructions of masculinity, in this chapter I demonstrated that the Somali first generation diaspora women from my sample are quite clearly involved in transnational politics. In particular, I argued that the consequences of the Somali civil war and the “war on terror” are shaping respondents’ transnational political participation.

As disconcerting as the civil war and its impact may have been on Somalis, there is an important silver lining; that is, living outside the country and dealing with diaspora experiences seems to have affected traditional gender roles in a positive way, leading to a relatively

egalitarian relationship between men and women. Now, more diaspora women believe in the power of individual human beings to determine their political capacity, rather than social agency as a function of gender; consequently, this has encouraged some first generation women to see themselves as full citizens within and across multiple political landscapes. The majority of the respondents deem themselves to be model counterpoints for the competitive, clan-minded men whose irrationality and belligerent demeanor caused the collapse of the country and the mass exodus of Somalis. They often highlighted women's moral superiority and that their impetus to participate within the transnational political field occurs in relation to higher moral issues. Some of them moved beyond narrow identification with the clan, as their diaspora experiences have led them to gain new perspectives and develop other options. The first generation women of my sample are contesting the clan's "old boys' club," and are thus striving to advocate unity and solidarity for the Somali cause.

The political identities and practices of the diaspora women of my sample are shaped between and within the contexts of both Somalia and Minneapolis/London. According to the accounts given in the interviews, women have a significant presence as transnational political activists not only to address issues with Somalia's male driven political power, but also to represent Somalis from afar. My findings suggest that my respondents are long-distance nationalists not because they consider themselves to be Somalis who carry an image of a homeland that is separate from the host country in which they reside, but because they take actions on behalf of Somalia while continuing to live in Minneapolis or London.

While diaspora members are often seen as having more radical political views and supporting conflicts (Anderson, 1998), this chapter shows that diaspora women's political positions are formed by a human rights perspective. That is, my respondents maintain that the

US and UK counterterrorism policies, as well as their agenda for stabilizing the so-called fragile states, are complicated by unintended negative consequences that cannot be ignored. Therefore, the diaspora communities must display their solidarity and bring to the fore the impacts of these policies on the Somali people. In response to the consequences of these counterterrorism policies, the chapter demonstrates that some respondents took part in protests and called the diaspora movement together in collective action on a transnational scale. Respondents' narratives of protests in Minneapolis and London indicate that they adopted the subjective position of champions of the rights of their people. Thus, the quiet attitude that was the norm among first generation Somali women is becoming outdated in diaspora contexts.

However, as I stated in previous chapters, Somali diaspora women are not a homogeneous group in terms of political orientation, background, age, and sense of belonging. Not all of the respondents in my study have direct ties to the homeland, nor do they identify exclusively with the Somali national identity. For the 1.5 generation respondents who reside and were raised in either Minneapolis or London, Somalia's politics are simply too distant and complex to merit their full attention or interest; their political attachment is, therefore, weaker and more generalized. Additionally, like all immigrants, the young members of the Somali diaspora are caught within an 'in-between' situation: they are not entirely Somali, British or American, and thus they must continually bargain for their respective identities. In the next chapter, which focuses on the political participation of 1.5 generation respondents, I will demonstrate how the younger respondents' political interest is oriented more toward diaspora location, and less toward Somalia.

## Chapter 8: Social Relationships and Sociopolitical Life: 1.5 Generation Respondents

### **Introduction**

In the previous three chapters, the research focus was on the first generation respondents, the strategies they employ in defending and creating a respectable image as the Somali community, their motivation for political engagement, and the social capital they utilize to overcome barriers to political participation. In this chapter and the next, I examine the systemic barriers, discrimination, and challenges that the younger 1.5 generation have experience as well their unique challenges in political participation and social capital formation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the two generations deserve separate examination because they differ in political attitude, educational attainment, socialization process and social connections as well as having a greater range of difference within their respective generations. For example, as it was shown in Chapters 5 and 6, first generation respondents respond to stigma and discrimination by holding onto their ethnic, national and religious identity, which provided a pathway to political participation suited to their self-definition as temporary dwellers and transnational subjects. To the contrary, because the younger respondents feel permanency in their adopted cities, their identity is formed in response to finding their place within its society and their pathways are much different due to the factors of generation as well as location.

In this chapter, I examine the meaning of “belonging” for the younger generation and the factors that motivate the 1.5 respondents’ political interest, as well as the social capital and networks that cultivate their political activity. The issues presented include the formation of various positionalities as the result of structural processes and in what way the relationship of domination and subordination are fashioned by the discriminatory practices in each locality.

The respondents shared stories of how discriminatory treatment was experienced. These incidents sometimes were regarded as intermittent and marginal; others were reported as being very hurtful and traumatic, and have profoundly affected their political life.

### **Discrimination in Primary School: Minneapolis**

For years, theorists have claimed that education has been used as a tool of oppression, indoctrinating minorities that their culture is inferior to the dominant White culture (hooks, 2001). bell hooks argued that the power structures inherent in the classroom disseminates to both Blacks and Whites the belief that Blacks are of lesser value. She asserted that, for many, education was used to maintain White dominance by socializing Whites to experience their “superiority.”

Immigrant children are subjected to unfair treatment from various institutions including schools. Danico (2004) explained the effect that feelings of alienation and intolerance at school had on the academic performance of Korean children in Hawaii. This discrimination has resulted in a high rate of high school drop-outs among these Korean students. Saran (2015) claimed that even Asian youth, the model minority when speaking of education, are not safe from racism and face biases and marginalization in schools and colleges.

The 1.5 generation respondents of my study share with other minorities these school experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and prejudice; however, as I said above, my respondents also confront intense stigmatization based on their ethnoreligious identity. Based upon some respondent’s accounts, their interest in politics was fueled by discriminations they experienced at school. Baydan, a political activist from Minneapolis, shared that her early interest in politics resulted from the imposition by some teachers of their White cultural dominance and in particular the highlighting of the immigrant students’ status as outsiders.



Often these teachers spoke in derogatory terms about ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds.

Baydan explained she never thought the society, let alone her teachers, would categorize someone who had grown up in Minnesota as being an outsider. This disjunction between Baydan's understanding of belonging and the teachers' opinions ignited her anger, then created a burning challenge which led ultimately to her emergence as an activist and advocate for minority rights at school. She stated:

When you are young you have certain expectations of your teachers; that of being treated well, having your talents uplifted and building your self-esteem. Instead my experience with some teachers was the opposite... it was frustrating because they never hid their disparaging attitude. I hated hearing comments like "you people" or "these Somalis and their parents don't understand our education system", or "poor kids, it's not their fault if they have been culturally deprived"...or things like "of course that they are late just imagine the time they spend in getting ready with all the religious clothing they have to wear". As someone unfamiliar with discrimination, I couldn't step in and defend the mistreated because I felt powerless. I thought to myself, 'I need to do something about this and soon I will learn how'. I can now participate in Minneapolis politics and change society in a profound way because it is through policy development that major societal change happen (Baydan, 27 Minneapolis).

The main problem confronted by young Muslim and immigrant students is the general lack of knowledge and respect for their culture and religion by teachers, administrators, and classmates (Aguirre & Turner, 2010). These students, like Baydan, are often stigmatized and viewed as inferior. From Baydan's testimony, it is evident that her American teachers saw her Somali Muslim identity as fundamentally flawed and thus of less value than a Western identity. This hegemonic stance which privileges Western culture (bell hook, 2001) and the school as the structural context within which the discrimination took place motivated Baydan toward political participation as a means to confront the power dynamic between White/teacher and Black/Muslim/female/student. In high school and university, Baydan took on leadership roles while advocating for cultural diversity and social justice. She became involved in the campaign to elect President Obama. As an artist who mixes Somali poetry narration with rap, Baydan

taught others the history and practice of Somali oral literature while working with Somali American community organizations. She cowrote a play chronicling the journey and experiences of Somali immigrants in Minneapolis. She stated that becoming politically conscious allowed her to develop creatively and live beyond the limitations set by society.

Racism and stigmatization were also reported by others from Minneapolis. Carawelo and Mulki, both college students, spoke about the way their Muslim and African identities were used to make them feel inferior and that this bigotry shaped their political involvement. Carawelo said:

I remember that often at school, the cafeteria food servers became annoyed when we would ask if there were pork products in the food. One day I overheard one of them saying ‘where they came from people are dying of hunger and here they want special food!’ I thought how ignorant and racist that is! (Carawelo, Minneapolis).

Other respondents asserted that even their ability to speak English was an issue for some schools. Ilhan and Sahara, both professionals who grew up in Minneapolis and are fluent English speakers, revealed that school officials made many assumptions about their language skills because they did not fit the image of an English-speaker. In primary school, each time they attempted to enroll in a new school, officials made them pass the ESL test to continue taking regular classes. The registration office explained that this was necessary because they were from Somali households. These respondents shared that their early political activism stems from this school policy of reassessing the English language proficiency of students from immigrant backgrounds instead of relying on school transfer records as was done for nonimmigrant students.

## **Discrimination K-12 School: London**

For the 1.5 generation respondents being discriminated against was a unifying experience. London respondents described experiencing racism and classism and the recollections triggered frustration and pain that was visible in their faces. For example, Ilwad, a 31 year old director of a nonprofit organization, shared that her school experience was saturated with gendered religious discrimination. She told of one teacher, clearly fielded by bigotry, who verbalized low expectations of her Muslim female students. This teacher's negative attitude had a strong influence on the way Ilwad and other Muslim students felt about their abilities as well as their post-high-school aspirations. Ilwad commented:

When I was in secondary school, my science teacher used to point out how the Muslim girl students in the class were wasting our time. She would say "Why are they even in this class. It is better for them to learn to cook and be good housewives because that is their future. They are not going to do anything productive with their lives (Ilwad, London).

Ilwad shared that she is engaged, planning for marriage, and continues to work and plans on a career during marriage. Yet her teacher believed the future of Muslim female students was limited to marriage and child rearing and that they should not explore options beyond household life. Many British women manage to both raise healthy families and lead high-powered careers. However, when it comes to Muslim women, the misperception is that they cannot strike a balance between careers and family life or worse that they do not have ambitions outside the role of wife and mother.

Similarly, liberal feminists limit Muslim women's options by not granting agency to these women (Choudhury, 2009) to choose bigger dreams. This disconnect is even greater when the same option if taken by a white non-Muslim woman (i.e., to stay home and raise children), is considered a self-actualized choice, but if chosen by a Muslim woman it is deemed her only

choice. Ilwad revealed that her experience was not an isolated one. She felt strongly that there was a connection between the low number of academic scholarship awards to Muslim young women and the gender stereotype her teachers had about Muslim women as students. Additionally, she asserted that she wants to shape the politics of the UK for the sake of Muslim girls and she is determined to do that as a political activist fighting against racist teachers' stereotypes and biases. Ilwad engages a more proactive approach in her political involvement so that her participation may one day leads to a Britain that values her Muslim identity.

Other respondents cited classist discriminations in the classroom and other places within the school. Deqa, a 27 year old nurse, came to London when she was 10 years old. Both her parents are from Mogadishu and were doing relatively well before the Somali civil war. Her father was a paralegal and her mother worked at the department of agriculture. Deqa and her family lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for years before settling in London. Deqa said, "I don't have any recollection of Somalia but my parents always recall life in the old country. Their school and college experience is different than mine because they were free from race and class pressure. I'm not going to lie I wish I had grown up in a society without any "ism."".

According to Deqa's she found herself struggling simultaneously against race and class. She explained that her British-born peers did not seem to understand the significance of being a refugee:

At school often my race and refugee background were used against me as some students commented on my dark skin, some others that I was poor because I was refugee. I remember a teenage boy who used to make classist statements: 'I am from a rich family-I should not be attending the same school attended by refugees'. I dealt with snobbishness as some students wouldn't even acknowledge me. It was really bad. I hated it and that is why I decided to go to nursing school so no one would ever again call me poor (Deqa, London) .

The taunting Deqa endured has been “evil and really hurtful”. She stated that her education is an asset and plans to form an organization that address structural classism and can offer support to minority children experiencing stigmatizations and classicism at school: “I believe education is a social equalizer but to deal with classism other measures are needed because class is a socially accepted prejudice in London” (Deqa, London).

Perceptions of experiencing classism were also reported by two other respondents. Aliyaa, a college student, and Amanna, a lobbyist, addressed feeling stigmatized because they were eligible to use free school meal vouchers. Amanna said “free meals at school is a marker of poverty. Children from wealthy families made fun of me getting free food. It was embarrassing. It made me feel like I didn’t have good parents who could take care of me.”

Amanna recounted that she was not aware that using free meals meant being low income:

I thought that using free meals was normal and that all students were getting free meals, until one day I sat the table of the cool girls and I was ridiculed as they called me poor for the type of meal ticket I had. I felt sad and depressed after that day and for a long time I avoided using free meals voucher (Amanna, London).

According to the respondents these negative experiences at school made them aware of the existence of a class system in British society. At the same time this discovery galvanized their political orientation and motivated them to fight against this prejudice. Amanna said

I feel that Britain is highly influenced by the concept of social class and we need to change this concept. It should not be ranking based on social status. I became educated so I can understand the political system and learn ways to fight classism. The first policy I advocated for was to change the voucher system because they identify the student who receives free meals at school (Amanna, London).

The account of the respondents from London illuminates that discrimination is not only limited to race, ethnicity, and religion but is also rooted in the class system. Although all respondents provided personal accounts that led to their belief in political engagement as a tool

for responding to perceived stigmatization. Additionally London respondents are suggesting that education would give them a greater voice in politics as it elevates their status into elitism.

### **Not All Teachers are Racist**

Not all interviewees found schools as discouraging. Several respondents' highlighted instructors who were pivotal in their obtaining sound civic and political education. Shamsa, a 32 year-old teacher, cited positive experiences during secondary school where influential teachers interested in politics took the time to explain issues and promote discussions of current events; which was also the reason she became a teacher.

Shamsa stated:

I learned the value of social responsibility from classroom-based civic education, elections, debates, as well as the college's newspaper that dealt with political events and minority rights. My civic education teacher used to tell us if you want to make change in things that matter to you and impact you as a citizen then express your opinion by voting –'become an engaged citizen'. When I feel too lazy to vote or don't feel like being active, I remember my instructor's advice and it gives me the motivation to get going (Shamsa, London).

According to Shamsa's remarks teachers can serve as agents of political socialization, and she echoed Heater and Gillespie's (1981) claim that schools with goals to teach sociocultural practices and impart knowledge on how to navigate the political structure and processes can influence students in a positive way.

Riwan from Minneapolis described her time in school as important to her political development because while the course studies shaped her knowledge, the learning environment raised her awareness of political issues, candidates' agendas, and campaign promises. For Riwan, school created opportunities for thoughtful and concentrated activity, especially when teachers discussed current events, held forums on controversial issues, and assigned research projects.

It is important to note that respondents who shared their primary school experiences whether negative or positive did not talk about classmates or school social groups having any influence or role in their political learning or aspirations to actively participate in political life. In contrast, when respondents commented about the college campus experience, as seen in the following section, they highlighted that involvement in organizations gave them access to peers who then provided friendship, support, and political information.

### **Social Capital 1.5 Generation**

The importance of social capital, as previously stated, is to develop relationships and networks of trust and reciprocity that build the capacity of individuals and groups to access information and promote cross cultural liaisons which assist with political knowledge and engagement (Granovetter, 1983; Putnam, 2000). In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that for first the generation respondents, bonding social capital was essential in providing resources necessary for their political engagement. This section examines the social networks and social capital that encourage 1.5 generation respondents to become politically active. I explain that while they are aware of their Somali background, their social networks are based less on cultural ties and more on contextual relationships of the moment such as school, work, and social associations.

Other studies found that nonethnic forms of social connection expanded the information network of immigrants, allowing them to get ahead by obtaining employment and garnering support to cope with life's challenges (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2008; Morosanu, 2013). The same type of social connection has expanded the political views of my respondents. Nonethnic networks allowed the young respondents of my study to get involved in politics and advance a panminority coalition. They believed that there were problems inherently affecting all minorities and that the acts of racism experienced by different minorities are not disconnected from each

other, thus, the need to form coalitions. This contrasts the homogenous image that Kusow (2004) gave about the Somali Canadian he interviewed.

Universities student associations, community organizations, social justice groups and trade unions emerged as important sites for the development of social capital. Membership in these social networks manifested social capital in different ways such as increased information flow, generating norms of reciprocity, and constructing a collective identity, which helped respondents gain political awareness. In this study, political awareness refers to the level to which respondents are informed about politics and capable of making decisions that are consistent with their self-interest.

### **Forming Social Capital within Student Organizations**

College student life offers an opportunity for organizational involvement that is not available to nonstudents. Institutions of higher education have been considered important trainers of the young adult in civic responsibility and the public contributions necessary for a thriving democracy (McBee, 1980). Scholars Jarvis, Montoya, and Mulvoy (2005) discovered that college students receive a unique set of civic resources and opportunities as they experience political socialization at a higher level with more occasions to establish diverse relationships.

At the time of the interviews, four respondents were attending college, while others had already graduated. Of the 20 respondents, eight reported having personal experiences with student organizations. These student organizations can be divided into secular and religious organizations. By secular, I mean nonreligious organizations such as student governments or student associations. The student organizations are diverse in terms of their purpose, ethnicity, gender, politics, academic interest, and so forth. Respondents all agreed they experienced



diversity when being involved in student organizations, and this allowed them to have access to different perspectives and information.

Five respondents (three from Minneapolis and two from London) shared their experience in Muslim student organizations, and the other five talked about the political resources and support system that were available through secular organizations. The participants' desire to join and seek support from one type of organization over another indicates their heterogeneity. Some respondents were more religiously observant than others, which was obvious by their choice of dress. Those who were less religious could easily shift between identities and might choose gender identity over ethnicity, letting circumstances dictate who they will appear to be when determining their choice of organization. For example, one respondent Suban, a graduate from the University of Minnesota, emphasized her religiosity and noted that when trying to find the right university she always looked at how the university accommodated Muslim student associations.

According to respondents, both the secular and religious organizations facilitated students' cultural connections and sociopolitical integration into campus life, as well as their acculturation beyond the walls of the university.

### **Muslim Student Association: Minneapolis**

As discussed above and throughout this thesis, religion plays a central role in the identity of many respondents. Some of them, like Suban, joined the on-campus Muslim Student Association (MSA) seeking fellowship and community. Significant reasons given for participation in MSA included personal development, connecting with and deepening their faith, networking opportunities, and becoming involved in campus political life and charitable outreach events. However, the social relationship they built within the college had lasted after college.

Three respondents, including Suban, reported involvement with MSA at Minneapolis universities. In some cases, these involvements were because of pre-existing political identity, and the MSA experiences connected them with more Muslim students and off-campus mosques or faith-based associations and solidified political commitments that were already in place. Suban described the social capital that MSA provided lasting and powerhouse. The other two respondents were especially influenced by the knowledge they gained through their experience within such organizations.

Suban is a stay-at-home mother and interested in housing and development policy. She asserted that while still at the university she was an active member in the MSA. She reported that through participation in (MSA) activities, young Muslim students developed important cooperative skills, gained an awareness of community issues, and enhanced their ability to be a part of the solution. Suban shared that she was the representative of the Muslim Student Association on the interfaith council from 2008 to 2009 and that experience provided her a unique opportunity to build collaborating relationships with non-Muslim students. She said:

When our association launched petitions against the screening of a controversial Islamophobic documentary on campus, students from other faiths stood with us. We were able to collect enough signatures to stop the documentary being shown on our campus. I still have contacts with some of the members of the interfaith council and when I need help with complex policy issues, I contact them for advice. I trust them because they showed integrity on many occasions (Suban, Minneapolis).

Suban was also proud of the leadership that the organization demonstrated in creating a more inclusive atmosphere on campus. She cited the prayer space allocated for Muslim students to conduct their five mandatory daily prayers at her campus, which was obtained due to the MSA's petition submitted to the university administration. Suban stated, "All these experiences laid the groundwork to be more comfortable in sharing spaces, working and interacting with a variety of individuals from different backgrounds."

Suban claimed that when she found out that her Phillips neighborhood, where a good number of the home owners are Muslim and immigrants, was slated for gentrification (the process of revitalization and rebuilding which drives up rents and forces out longtime low-income residents), her activism experience and leadership capacity all came back. Suban engaged in coalition building with people from her neighborhood so they can prevent gentrification. She said:

This is where I grew up. It is my neighborhood I had to do something to save it. With the help of others I started a neighborhood initiative. We collected signatures to prevent our neighborhood from gentrifying but when the property management company ignored our request I called an old friend a lawyer that I met when I was part of the interfaith council who advised me to contact members of the city council to get involved. He also told me to be well prepared because to justify gentrification a lot of people including city council will make it sound like it is good for everyone. We followed his advice and prepared counter argument...not only we stopped the gentrification plan we got neighborhood grant so we can revitalize ourselves our neighborhood. If you engage in challenging powerful people like developers you have to have good networks (Suban, Minneapolis).

It is evident from Suban's remarks that experiences acquired within the college social network and social relations can last and produce personal return and collective return. Suban's entire neighborhood benefited from her activism and mobilization capacity as well as her friendship with the lawyer who facilitated their action and was critical in their counterargument. Suban asserted that in order to confront power one must have a trusted network that can understand well the language of power and can develop strategies to confront. This valuable network can be found outside of the subjects' ethnic circle (Morosanu, 2013). Moreover, from Suban's experience, it is apparent that motherhood and activism can coexist. Suban is a 26 year-old and becoming a mother did not stop her from fighting developers and power. With her network, she was able to make her neighbor's issue relevant to politicians. In all the time Suban

talked her story and activism, she never mentioned being an immigrant. Again and again she emphasized her belonging to Phillips neighborhood.

Jihan, a graduate from Augsburg College in Minneapolis, recalled the student organization's weekly meetings and the information exchanged with fellow members:

We got insights and information about current events and the media and whether something will affect us as students or our Muslim community. These updates allowed me to address the issues and help others to benefit from the valuable information shared. I have learned more about media biases from this organization than in the classroom. The media, in particular Fox News, misrepresents Somalis because we are the largest Muslim community in the state and when terrorism happens they always bring this up as if to say Somalis pose a threat to Minneapolis society. But we ARE Minneapolis society and we cannot harm our own community (Jihan, Minneapolis).

In the above extract, Jihan describes how the Minnesota mass media allows discourses which portray Muslim and Somalis as terrorists. The media erects walls between mainstream Minneapolitans and Somalis and assigns values in which the Somalis are seen as the "others" and a "threat." To be "Somali" implies not being from Minneapolis and assumes having human qualities that differs from the dominant identity. When a person with a Muslim background commits a crime, the background becomes the foreground in explaining the reason behind the crime, and those who are Muslim become guilty by default without investigation into the details. It is this political construct, the labeling of Muslims as terrorists, that Jihan criticizes and that her membership in the Muslim student organizations helped her to identify and refute.

Mulki, a junior at the University of Minneapolis, talked about the role the MSA had taken in voter engagement activities. According to Mulki, the MSA operated a voter registration phone bank to increase Minneapolis area Muslim voters' participation. She said that the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs reached out to the MSA for help to engage communities that are underrepresented in politics. Mulki was among the volunteers

who participated in calling potential voters and assisting them with the voter registration process.

She said:

We called constituents, each of us working one hour shifts, in hopes of getting as many registered to vote as possible. Some of the people we called were Somali and when I explained that I was part of an MSA they immediately trusted me and promised to vote (Mulki, Minneapolis).

Mulki asserted that the MSA is well-connected and provides an organizational context that offers political capacity to its members. In explaining that the MSA was trusted to engage minority communities to exercise their rights, Mulki exposes the contradiction that Somalis and other minorities face. In everyday life they are viewed as outsiders, as Jihan stated above, but at campaign time the same stigmatized subjects are courted by both Republicans and Democrats because minority votes can help elect a candidate.

### **Muslim Student Association: London**

Similar to the responses provided by respondents from Minneapolis, London participants also asserted that being part of the MSA was valuable for their personal and political development. Ifrah, 26 year-old a drop out from the University of London, talked about the role that MSA took in organizing political presentations where politicians were invited to talk about their views on policy. Based on her accounts, she “was able to understand complicated policies after the candidate explained them at these campus forums” (Ifrah, London).

Asiya, a student at St George's University of London, learned the dynamics of bridging communities as a member of MSA and a volunteer in their charitable outreach events. Asiya recounted that members of the MSA collected money to donate for the victims of the Japanese earthquake in 2011 by hosting bake sales and marketing t-shirts. She reported that this gesture built good rapport with Japanese students who mistakenly thought the MSA's activities were limited to the well-being of Muslim students and communities. She remarked:

A lot of people have misconceptions about Islam-based associations. People think we care only about Muslims and their causes. Actually as we are citizens of Britain, our community is not limited to Muslims and we support those in need regardless of their religion. When people accept that we all share the same human values then hatred and competition will lessen. I think spending time in building relationships is good for all of us and for our future (Asiya, London).

This statement constructs a representation that adequately captures the mindset of most British Muslims, while at the same time drawing attention to the misrepresentation of Muslims as a closed community indifferent to common human needs. Some scholars found that Muslim students were more likely to participate in racial or cultural awareness discussions and form relationships with diverse students than Christian and Jewish students (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Moreover, Asiya asserted that in order to strengthen one's community building skills, one must create relationships and generate social capital.

Participants highlighted the value of an MSA, as it is active in mobilizing support around Muslim students' needs and promoting Muslim students' ability to cultivate bridging social capital as they work to present a positive "public ethnicity." In addition, respondents expressed concerns that the existence of their associations now serve to actively protect Muslim students' freedom of association. They shared that university administrations are under much more pressure to monitor the MSA's activities. This point came out very clearly in Asiya's statement, as she was upset about allegations that these campus groups harbored radical Islamists:

Muslim Student Organizations are just like other collegiate student organizations. Their purpose is to assist with Muslim students' needs, set up informal discussion groups, sponsor programs for members and focus on learning outside the classroom. But since Islam is suspected of promoting violence, suspicions about our activities became the norm. We noticed different treatment from the school administration compared to other student associations. Anyway their scrutinizing or anti-Muslim campaign won't stop us; to the contrary we are becoming more active and building more networks with other students who oppose any form of discrimination (Asiya, London).

Due to the acts of terror by several students and former students at British universities, Britain's higher institutions must deal with new measures imposed by the government.

Universities are required to be hypervigilant and take necessary precautions to protect young students from the lure of extremism on university campuses. Universities are tasked with averting students from being brainwashed with extremist views and now are “denying space for radicalism and reducing exposure to existing radicals and radical ideas” (Brown & Saeed 2015, p. 1954). Not only are the universities lumping all Muslims together, giving no opportunity for true followers of Islam to counter the radicals’ claims, they are limiting the very purpose of an institution of higher learning as they stifle open debate. Thus, Muslim Student Associations, because they symbolize the face of Islam on their campuses, are scrutinized further causing Muslim students to negotiate their religious identity and defend their activities and practices on campuses.

However, the emphasis of the respondents was that MSAs promote the simple virtue of celebrating Islam while providing social services to their members. The association provides college students a healthy venue to develop their faith and engage in philanthropy. In other words, the MSA is central to the construction of students’ civic and moral identity which prepares them to become engaged citizens.

### **Social Capital within Secular Student Associations**

A recurrent theme among those who participated in student associations was that political socialization within these bodies had made up for the shortcomings of familial political socialization. This was true for both locations. Respondents shared that discussions about government and politics were absent from their homes. This can be linked to their parents’ political culture and background. As discussed in earlier chapters, many first generation Somalis grew up in a political system run by a harsh dictator. Women, in particular, were excluded from political leadership and direct opposition and protest were illegal. People were afraid to openly

engage in politics (Samatar, 1988). These socialization practices reflect their parent's restriction from self-representation, so the passing on of their behavioral norm, which seemed necessary for the shielding of their daughters from the "harms" of politics, no longer fits in these democratic diaspora locations.

The daughters' views on politics and gender roles are changing as other agents of political socialization have taken the primary responsibility in their development. Warsan, a member of the University of Minnesota Student Association (SA), disclosed that the organization provided her with avenues to involvement in politics and to break out of her family's conservatism. At the time of the interview, Warsan was interning at Wellstone Action (an organization dedicated to progressive social change)<sup>4</sup>. She was active in politics and volunteered in President Obama's 2012 campaign. According to her, this was all possible because of her membership in the SA:

Realistically speaking, I would not have landed my internships or become a community organizer if it was not for my association membership. I am from a conservative family. Particularly, my mother believes that a woman should be a wife and mother and not be in politics or hold leadership positions. But when I got into this group, I realized that women have a lot of opportunity and I wanted to be an activist. I told my mother that I have to be part of the SA as it is part of the university's mission and activism is one of the student activities. At a social justice conference where I represented the SA, I met the leaders of Wellstone Action. After I shared with them that I would like to become a community organizer, they invited me to apply for an internship position with them. You know, in a diverse group you have the opportunity to gather a broad range of valuable information, meet people from all walks of life and discover women's role in government and how as a citizen you can affect the political process (Warsan, Minneapolis).

Warsan suggested the student government association had a prominent role in orienting her toward politics and activism. The social capital offered by the group in combination with their association with other organizations helped her obtain knowledge, acquire an impassioned

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<sup>4</sup> Wellstone Action is a not-for profit political organization based in Saint Paul, Minnesota.  
<http://www.wellstone.org/>



attitude, and develop a sense of agency for the public arena. Her membership in the SA gave her opportunity to understand her rights and privileges and to learn how to advocate for change through legal activism within the existing political structure.

It is worth noting that by her political involvement Warsan's activities confronted her family's conservative apolitical patterns. Warsan described her mother's gendered political view as "conservative" and refrained from labeling it as being a part of Somali culture. When asked to explain this, Warsan said, "I have great respect for my Somali background, and I don't believe in cultural essentialism. I do know many older Somali women who are activists, and this means that my mother's view is not cultural but personal." Warsan rejects the categorization of Somali women as a homogenous group, and my study agrees. She portrays herself as being bicultural and proud of her heritage.

The London respondents' experience with student association was similar. Samiya, studying international relations at a London university, shares these views. Despite her own political interests, she avoids discussing current affairs with her mother and refrains from initiating political discussions with her family. Samiya's mother does not understand the political system in Britain. Samiya stated, "Whenever I said anything about politics, my mother would say, 'Be careful – you can be arrested.' She thinks that Britain is like Somalia and if you show opposition to the government you can be arrested." Although Samiya had learned the importance of voting, it was at a protest arranged by the Student Association that her passion for social justice activism came alive:

Occupy London' was the first protest I've ever been to. I felt good and like a productive citizen. My progressive student group saw 'Occupy London' as an opportunity for revolutionary change and arranged for our participation. Being part of the movement was exciting, and the protest inspired me to stop being afraid to voice my political concerns (Samiya, London).

Certainly, the forums and activities offered by the Student Association provided respondents with opportunities for active involvement in their surrounding community.

Another respondent, Surer, a graduate from University of East London, said:

During high school, my parent's forbid me from joining protests because they thought it risky and that if I participate I can be arrested or have my citizenship revoked. My parents and others really believe this rumor circulating within the community. I understood their worries because immigrants are not treated as full citizens; at college I learned my rights and the difference between civil disobedience and protest. I like the power that protest gives to young citizens. Also, if we become more political, maybe we can make important changes to our status as citizens (Surer, London).

The reason Surer's parents were worried was the conditional citizenship held by immigrants. Naturalized citizens do not possess all the rights that natural-born citizens have. When people who have immigrated to the UK commit certain crimes, they can have their citizenship taken away (Gower, 2015), and the revoking of citizenship is inevitably accompanied by deportation. Native-British citizens have first-class status and cannot have their citizenship revoked. Unlike immigrants, they cannot be made stateless peoples. Surer's parents, who are refugees, experienced stateless general dispossession before they were awarded British citizenship. Citizenship is viewed as the ultimate marker of security and it must be guarded.

Therefore, when they try to dissuade their daughter from getting into politics which could put her citizenship in jeopardy, they are protecting her from these risks. Other scholars have noted that first-generation immigrants value the acquiring of citizenship more than the younger generation (Maxwell, 2006) who take it for granted because since they were raised in this country, they believe the rights are automatically and permanently theirs.

Surer's parents and their circle were misinformed, and in this case the misconceptions became reinforced by the tight-knit community. This discussion lends support to the findings of studies examining ethnic networks and political information. Granovetter (1983) discovered that

strong ties and homogenous networks reduced the quantity of new information or different opinions which limited the members' views and subsequent actions.

Similarly, Leighley and Matsubayashi (2009), in examining information flows through ethnic networks, pointed out that the information people attain from their network depends on the quantity of sources and quality of the information they put forth. That is, individuals who belong to broader and more expert networks have access to substantially better political information and can make more educated political decisions than people who interact in smaller and less-expert circles. Homogenous networks reproduce the same repetitive information, much like a rumor mill, whereas heterogeneous networks are prone to generate novel information as it is often debated and examined when it passes through the network.

It should be noted that although the study's focus is on political participation Surer was quick to identify intersections of gender, race, and religion and that the overlapping identities can create political solidarity. She said:

My campus was diverse, and the chance to be informed on a wide range of issues is higher in a diverse environment. I never liked limiting myself to one social group and possibly miss the opportunity to learn from others. Since I straddle multiple identities, belonging to a diverse student network helped me to understand the mediation of power structures and the evolution of relationships. You know these relationships are critical to the success of mobilization efforts around political issues both on and off campus...we live in a fragmented society, so it is important to learn how to reach a common understanding and to coordinate activities (Surer, London).

She continued:

When I had issues relating to religion and am judged by my hijab or called a terrorist, I reached Muslim members regardless of their gender. If I was dealing with gender issues, then I engaged female members, no matter their ethnicity. If my problem was race, I used to go to Black members. If I was confronted by my immigration status, I used to go to other immigrants no matter their country of origin. I am all of these identities, and their issues and challenges were and are mine (Surer, London).

What is particularly interesting about the preceding quotes is that Surer recognizes that identity can be both instrumental and circumstantial. It is instrumental in that services and affiliations are often designated according to one or more of their identity markers and intentionally sought according to that designation. It is circumstantial in that random instances of acknowledgement of one of the identity markers can influence one's formation of opinion and affiliation, such as being called a "terrorist" on the street or being cheated in a retail transaction because it is assumed that foreignness equals ignorance. The respondents demonstrated strong awareness that being female, Black, Muslim, and immigrant will have special implications as they navigate through society and that these multiple identities consequently shapes their political consciousness and activism.

Political intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991) becomes apparent in the accounts of my respondents. Crenshaw and Collins have criticized those liberal Western feminist scholars who focus on a particular type of singular consciousness in which gender is the basic axis of social structure and the only source of oppression. Liberal feminists assume that gendered political consciousness originates exclusively from experiences as women and that experiences and political opinions can be best explained if gender is detached from other social categories such as race, religion, ethnicity and class. My study shows this is not true.

Instead, intersectionality promotes an understanding that women are shaped by the interaction of different social locations, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power, which together generate a matrix of privileges, dominations, and oppressions that cannot be examined separately from one another (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). This respondent echoed Crenshaw and Collins' theory on political intersectionality and asserted that gender is not

necessarily the most fundamental source of oppression, as other social characteristics they deal with often evoke harsher oppression. Thus, in order to achieve the change they seek, they must wage war against all these interlocking oppressions while remaining whole.

### **Obtaining Social Capital from Labor Unions**

Labor unions are national organizations in which their worker members are incorporated as individuals without regard to their ethnicity. Jarley (2005) asserted that union members tend to be more community-oriented and embedded in social networks. They support and organize members outside the workplace in ways that link members to new resources, empowering them to pursue their goals both inside and outside the work domain.

Although labor unions play a central role in protecting workers' rights as well as framing labor policy for their members, they also encourage the development of "emotional bonds among members and between the members and the union that builds resilient trust and generalized reciprocity. Unions influence the electoral attitude, mobilization and activism of their members" (Johnson & Jarley, 2005, p. 609).

The respondents who were members of trade unions discussed their activism and voting behavior which benefited from the relationship with their union members. These respondents appreciated union membership as it provided them with information, kindled collective action, and created a sense of belonging.

Shamso, a London teacher, noted that unions disperse relevant information about fairness and equality through traditional and social media, public debates, and direct communication with members. She claimed that union leaders are able to obtain favorable policy by mobilizing people for political action and towards influencing policymakers' decisions on issues. Shamso

explained that she became a union member after learning that the labor union favored family reunification and was helping some members dealing with that issue. She said:

My friend Cecile's husband is from Brazil. His asylum request has been denied, and consequently, he was deported. Cecile is trying to bring him back with the family reunification visa, but the process is not simple as the home office requests are unfeasible for her. For that, I took part in protests organized by the union to raise the visibility of issues of family reunification laws. I also signed an online petition started by members of the union (Shamso, London).

Others explained that membership in the union positively affected their awareness and understanding of political issues. Deqa, a nurse from London, asserted that her involvement with the union energized her political interest as members tended to be more concerned about politics and often discussed policy among themselves and with union leaders which clarified the issues.

Members from Minneapolis said their unions helped them understand political questions and promoted solidarity on issues. Simply put, union membership involves trust and affinity generated by interactions between members, which consequently promote dialogue as well as collective action. Jihan, who works for the city of Minneapolis, said:

In a unionized job, you develop deeper activism and solidarity. You are always fighting for the members and promoting ways to protect our rights. I have participated in protests for workers that don't even work in my area because we have each other's back" (Jihan, Minneapolis)

Nimco, also from Minneapolis and a county employee, explained that before her current job she worked in the private sector. In the old job, company policy prohibited sharing political information and opinions at work, so she was uninformed about local public affairs. She stated:

Before joining the union, I did not pay attention to commissioners or county sheriff candidates on the voting ballot. I never saw them as politicians for whom my vote mattered. But at the union information-sharing meetings and conversations with the local union rep, my friend and a hardcore Democrat, I discovered that commissioners and sheriffs actually affect my life. Commissioners hold power...they oversee county hiring, budgets and more. Same for the sheriff his office is responsible for law enforcement on the county level, which affects me and my family. Now I pay attention to the candidates

in these positions, and I vote for the candidate who I think deserves to be elected (Nimco, Minneapolis) .

The union bringing local politics into conversation is important political education for their members. Morales and Giugni (2011) explained that local governments develop programs and plans that influence the everyday life of all citizens, including immigrants. Local institutions are the first to respond to the growing ethnocultural diversity of society and implement policy frameworks that respond to the needs of immigrants. For this reason knowledge and ability to navigate the impact of local government regulations is important.

In addition to gaining the political knowledge that informed their voting patterns, my respondents emphasized that to foster interpersonal connections, their unions provided for social interaction by organizing member picnics, potluck lunches, movie nights, and set aside time for social interaction at meetings and conventions. Nimco remembered her first union meeting, where everyone greeted her like an old friend and appreciated her Somali background. She noted, “It was like the union members pride themselves on their cultural diversity and welcoming of differences.”

Jihan also recognized this cordial and respectful aspect about the union:

The part I like most is the feeling of being with friends...oftentimes the discussions and political strategies happen while we are eating pizza. Also, out of respect for our dietary restrictions, the union rep will order veggie or cheese pizza for those of us who don't eat pork. This is a sign of their desire to incorporate everyone in the union's activity (Jihan, Minneapolis).

This statement emphasizes the heterogeneity of the labor union members and the accessibility of the organization to every member. This incorporation constitutes a means by which respondents see diversity acknowledged and respected. This makes them trust the union and generates a sense of obligation and commitment to other union members' sociopolitical needs. Overall, it was clear in the discussions of the respondents that unions were seen as a

source of bridging social capital that expanded their civic knowledge and engagement. The relationship between the respondents of my study and trade unions coincided with past studies that have found strong correlations between union membership and political involvement (Johnson & Jarley, 2005). Yet, as shown above, my study goes further and provides insights on the role of trade unions in fostering young professional immigrants' political incorporation by a process wherein their differences are acknowledged and accepted such that they feel a sense of belonging. As noted earlier, my respondents are also proud of their background and some of them shared how Somali communities influenced their political engagement.

### **Somali Community Organizations and the 1.5 Generation**

In Chapter 4, I explained that Somali based organizations are heavily focused on community issues along with advocacy activities for the purpose of increasing the dynamics of community political incorporation. Somali Community Organizations (SCO) fight the root causes of inequality and discrimination as faced by Somalis in Minneapolis and London. Some of these organizations function as incubators for the civic attitudes and skills necessary to increase the political participation of young Somalis as well as to serve as recruitment networks for political activities.

Five respondents, two from London and three from Minneapolis, asserted that volunteering in Somali based organizations instilled in them civic virtues and nurtured their political activism as well as developing their skills in communication, engagement in collective decision-making processes, and resolutions of common concerns. Although the respondents were involved in other organizations, they shared feeling particular connections with Somali organizations and valued the expertise they acquired.



Ifrah and Asiya from London recounted that after graduation from high school they volunteered for Ocean Somali Community Association (OSCA) located in Tower Hamlets. OSCA is a nonprofit organization that provides free services for Somali in the East London neighborhoods. OSCA's objectives are to assist community members to access opportunities and reinforce relationships with the mainstream to create social changes. Ifrah said her volunteer roles varied daily; however, due to her bilingual skills, she often helped those with English language barriers. Ifrah said "I translated for lawyers and helped members with writing legal letters. The experience I gained turned handy later in life when I needed to write proper petitions".

For Asiya, who volunteered with the large number of unemployed Somalis that OSCA served, the trust she built with community members influenced her awareness and understanding of the power of building political collectives:

When I started volunteering I thought that I was going to provide help to community members. But actually I also got something out of it. Working with more seasoned volunteers was an advantage. They often talked about employment development programs and how to improve the life of marginalized low income people. Older volunteers encourage the young students to get involved in politics and help their community. That was when I realized that for me community advocacy and social equity would be a political commitment. Since then I have presented in various community events on politics and talk with people about important issues that resonate with Somalis dealing with poverty, violence and marginalization (Asiya, London).

Clearly the respondents volunteering at OSCA experienced a new logic of engagement as their exposure to community challenges provided better information and clearly defined plans of action which was not the case before when as community members they only held a vague understanding of the issues at hand. An additional benefit gained was that the organization provided a unique opportunity to be encouraged by people for whom the respondents' community had much respect. Asiya explained:

It was good to see elders of the community praise our efforts and encourage us to become leaders in taking the community to the next phase. It is not common to see an elderly Somali man advising a young woman to get involved in politics (Asiya, London).

The Somali traditional culture is biased against women in political leadership which is an attitude that is still lingering in some of the diaspora communities. So, for Asiya, volunteering at OSCA exposed her to people who valued her capacity which in turn gave her additional confidence and raised hope for the success of progressive changes in moving toward gender equality.

Three respondents from Minneapolis who previously did not vote reported that they became voters after being inspired by the Executive Director of the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota (CSCM) during training at their volunteering program. CSCM is located in an area of Minneapolis that is home to one of the largest Somali communities in the United States. This Cedar Riverside neighborhood also has high unemployment (Stoecker, 2010) when compared to other areas of Minneapolis and this have contributed to the political mindfulness of many in the community. This was articulated by Ilahn: “the center [CSCM] is the only place that I was able to formulate my political ideology and it shaped my electoral participation.” In the other two cases, it was the trustworthiness of the executive director that motivated their volunteering and their voting. Riwan described:

I grew up in the community center – my sisters and I went to the center to socialize after school and during the summer because we did not have money to go on vacation like my classmates. There we played sports, went on field trips to the library and science museum, and presented fashion competitions that the recreation center would organize – I remember the executive director, he was very engaged in our lives. He and other leaders would organize talks about what was going on in our neighborhood and how a lot can be changed if the community practices their right to vote. Then when I started volunteering there, I noticed that he was still encouraging people to vote. If a leader like him that has political experience that still cares about the well-being of the community and does not have any personal gain in your voting ... if he tells you to vote, then you vote because it is in our best interest (Riwan, Minneapolis).

There are some studies on minority participation that link the success of bonding associations to the leaders of those organizations and their prominence in the political system (Fennema & Tillie 2008; Tillie 2004). Behind this observation lies an understanding of the necessity for the leader to be both well-connected and well-informed as they work to motivate their members to political involvement.

While for some respondents their Somali leaders served a pragmatic function in the development of political interest by building bonding trust with the community organizations, other respondents implied that building nonethnic bridging coalitions was necessary for successful community impact.

### **Bridging in London: Coalition with Blacks**

Minorities share similar objectives when it comes to their circumstances in London. The majority of them are economically deprived relative to whites and experience substantial disparity in health, housing, education, and employment (Saggar et al., 2012). Because of these shared inequalities, more Somali British young people see their struggles as coexistent. Deqa and Shamso spoke of the strength of coalitions in pursuit of political interests. They believe that there is power in numbers and that coalitions can build a constituency with which to confront issues.

Deqa explained how her involvement with a social justice group changed her focus and political:

I have family members that are serving jail time. For a long time my focus and interest was the Somali community and criminal justice. There are too many young Somalis in London's jails... but after I joined a social justice group run by Black Briton, I learned that this is not a Somali issue but a Black issue because of discrimination in criminal justice processing... my group made me realize that we are divided we need to come together because the criminal justice system against Blacks can be changed only with collective action by all our Black communities (Deqa, London).

Incarceration rates of the Somali youth is a concern among Somalis. Data confirm that Somali young men are disproportionately represented in London's jail. Abdi (2012) stated that "63 out of the 2000 representing slightly over 3% of inmates at the institute are of Somali/Somaliland origin. This is especially high considering that the community only represents a tiny minority of the population" (p. 3). Some members within the older generation blame Britain culture and law enforcement. For example, in Chapter 5, Muhubo, one of the first generation respondents shared that her mission was to protect Somali young men as she believed that they were unfairly targeted by the police. The incarceration of Somali young men is a problem that is limited to London but shared by other cities such as Minneapolis. In Chapter 4, I discussed mothers of incarcerated sons and the political actions evaluated by women mosque goers. However Deqa's approach is different in that she believes the issue is about race and it need to address by building coalition with other Black communities.

Another respondent, Shamsa, believed that bridging by minorities enables the more effective pursuit of collective objectives as they present one voice:

Before, when I thought about activism, I used to think protests or rallies or things of that nature were the way to demand change. But when I started going to a Black women's group with my Ghanaian friend, I learned the importance of coalitions-bridging with different organizations and communities to achieve change. I was fascinated by the group's ideas and the commonality of our struggles as well as their willingness to unite our efforts. We are all in the same boat when it comes to discrimination and racism... then why not act collectively and join forces in combating inequities? (Shamsa, London).

These quotes confirm the younger respondents' engagement with non-ethnic groups, which provide social capital, thus challenging the simple narrative of the ethnic network. This demonstrates that these younger respondents are shaped by the social environment of their new countries as they see themselves as more than Somali and begin to construct their identity as Black. Shamsa said: "here being Somali means I am Black." Shamsa and Deqa do not attribute

a negative connotation to Black identity nor attempting to disassociate themselves from other Blacks (Kusow, 2004). To the contrary, they recognized it as a power that need to be embraced and nurtured. Moreover within non-Somali groups, respondents found commonalities causing them to reflect upon their own political activism initially based on their Somali identity and turned instead to embrace the concept of pan-minority.

### **Electoral Participation**

All respondents reported that they cast votes both in local and national elections. Often they pointed out that in Minneapolis/London, the right to vote is a critical source of political power and a meaningful symbol of their membership in society. They also spoke of voter discrimination experienced by others within their community due to barriers for those with limited English and other repressive voting policies.

Respondents emphasized that rather than be apathetic, people should vote so that a representative body forms that mirrors the population. Many articulated that voting is important as it impacts citizens' lives by the setting of policy and distribution of resources. They understand that being involved in the practice of politics is an opportunity and particularly the less citizens are involved in politics, the less likely it is that their concerns will be attended (Uhlener, 1991; Verba et al., 1995).

### **Electoral Participation: London**

Many respondents asserted that voting changes the quality, scope, and direction of the government that controls many aspects of citizens' lives. They believe that voting is the principal way for citizens to influence government and had firm opinions about the Labour party being the party that benefit minorities. For example, when explaining the importance of voting and voting for the Labour Party, Surer stated:

We need politicians who prioritize the needs of family and children. I want to work and be able to spend time with my child. We need politicians that can fight for working mothers' flextime and childcare subsidy. Conservatives and most male politicians cannot understand these issues. I would like to see more female Labour representatives. (Surer, London)

While all respondents reported that they vote, some showed less enthusiasm because they felt voting did not significantly impact the country's major policies. They believed that their vote is just one of many factors that affect outcomes. For example, Deqa pointed out that even when citizens vote, policy can still be ratified that contradicts the voter's beliefs due to competing political interests.

Aliyaa shared her disappointment in the Liberal Democrats whom she supported despite advice to vote for the Labour Party. Aliyaa said "I could not take the high tuition rate and once I learned that Liberal Democrats promised to actually take some actions I said 'you have my vote.' Liberal democrats did not deliver on their promise" (Aliyaa, London).

Similar was Samiya's reactions as she revealed her doubt of the usefulness of voting because of the history of insincere politicians who make promises during the campaign and change their position after elected. Samiya said: "In 2010, I remember spending hours convincing friends to vote for Nick Clegg. After he won and formed the coalition government; he could not keep his commitment. I feel bad for those who I convinced to vote for him I wish we could re-claim our vote."

Still others believe their vote makes a difference and they approach voting with a more positive attitude. Shamsa had a less cynical approach saying, "Voting allows us to be equals and our vote is stronger when we all vote. We win if we all vote." She like other respondents wanted minority communities to recognize their voting power and exercise their right.

## **Voting is a Commitment**

Respondents knew that voting is important and some stated an organized constituency could have stopped David Cameron and his austerity agenda. Ilwad highlighted that she has been voting since she became an eligible voter and takes voting seriously:

I grew up in a family where it was taught that good citizens voted, and pessimistic people didn't. That's what makes a difference. Both my parents continually talked about how if Somalia had been a democratic country where people choose their leaders there would not have been a civil war. I think this made me a lifelong voter...I have not missed-not even once- since I turned 18. I've been a committed voter for years and I am proud of it (Ilwad, London).

Ilwad asserted that in 2010 she took extra efforts and got involved with community organizers in her borough in mobilizing the young Muslim vote. Ilwad was critical of the Conservative party, whose campaign tone felt harsh and misinformed on the immigrant issue. She claimed that the conservative political narratives featured nativist tropes and vilification of immigrants and Muslims, allowing conservative White British to blame minorities for unemployment and social and cultural disintegration. She stated: "Election Day, as soon as I got up, I called all my friends and family to remind them to vote because that was my way of being a good citizen." Ilwad continued sadly saying, "Well we all know that did not help as we lost." When I asked her who she meant by "we" she stated "the Labour party along with the British minority." Despite this setback, Ilwad still believes in the power of the vote.

Amanaa, articulated that elections are decided by the people who show up at the polls "so immigrants and minorities need to show up and vote." She suggested that wealthy citizens are likely to cast their ballots as well as financial support which give them political clout beyond the election year. She asserted that if minorities were better organized, it would create opportunities

to tell elected officials and lawmakers how various policy decisions made at the local and national level affect them. She stated:

I think voting is very important, and as a good citizen I feel I have the responsibility to participate in politics. Voting influences our society and the way we live and it gives us the chance to express the type of government we want and the way we want to live. If I don't vote, I cannot complain about the political direction and argue about what needs to be changed. Also if I have not contributed then I am assuming that one cannot make change happen...What I mean is, we [minorities] complain a lot about laws and policies that are made on the domestic level that are not favorable to minorities and when we get the opportunity to do something about it we do nothing and surely the same political party that passed those unfavorable policies will get reelected. And what is our response? More complaints. We need to be more involved and participate in the political process and push hard to have our priorities included in the political agenda. Britain is a multicultural country and we must have a multicultural political agenda (Amanaa, London).

Amanaa sees voting as both a duty and responsibility, which can produce change in electoral outcomes. She maintains that voting leads to participation in political decision making. She considers the apathetic voting behavior of immigrants' as a major setback in fair distribution of resources and opportunities. Amanaa suggested that victory by the Conservative Party often leads to decisions that reflect affluent mainstream citizens' concerns, rather than the interests of the poor and immigrants. This conclusion is backed up by the fact that there is greater political participation from the affluent than from low income and immigrant populations (Verba et al., 1995). Amanaa underscores the class division she observes in the UK where status equates to power. She conveys a sense that mainstream politics is insensitive to immigrants' needs and demands even when the government emphasizes they are reducing the effects of inequality (Saggar, 2000).

Amanaa's formula for good government includes having a healthy multicultural political agenda. She stressed that there is a lack of legal means to ensure that multiculturalism is automatically enforced in Britain but that the concept is there. However what Amanaa failed to



recognize is that multiculturalism is not a neutral term. People interpret it differently, for some (mostly the White mainstream), multiculturalism means to show tolerance: Allowing diverse communities to keep the cultural tradition of their country of origin alive; as long as the ultimate supremacy of Anglo culture remains, the standard is fine. Others, like Amina, consider themselves representative of modern Britain, where multiculturalism is clearly visible in the setting of institutional and legislative policies and is built upon notions of fairness.

Amanaa appealed for more engagement by immigrants so they can be recognized as “good” citizens, whose input can help design and introduce more immigrant friendly and positive policies. However, she slipped into the stereotyping language used by conservatives, which includes racial as well as elitist code words. In fact she sounded like a conservative while she pled the progressive case:

Many immigrants are on welfare benefits. I bet many of them did not vote last election. They need to become informed citizens that are able to challenge and monitor politicians. When citizens are informed they can review a politician’s performance before they cast their vote. I also think that for immigrant women in general what has created such a large barrier to becoming involved is the culture and language barrier. Women often rely on their children to interpret for them and they are not independent. How can someone become independent if you don’t even have the language capacity to communicate with others or become informed and listen to people, understand them and make informed decisions? Language is the key to enable minorities to be truly a part of the mainstream society (Amanaa, London).

On the one hand, she is demanding a multiculturalism which permits the articulation of diverse cultures (including language) that are equal and contribute to the development of policies. On the other hand she is reiterating negative perceptions (i.e., cultural barrier) using the generalizations perpetuated by conservatives. Even as new arrivals, not all immigrants are welfare recipients. Some of the statements above negate her own success and that of women like

her. When asked about her contradictions Amina explained that she wants other women to succeed as she did.

By patronizing co-ethnics and assigning to them a wide range of negative traits including those attributed to economic status and language barriers, Amana attempts to carve out a nonstigmatized status at the bicultural middle of the acculturative spectrum. She has reached the “nearly White” status as her English and political knowledge becomes refined. Amina herself is an immigrant and she is a professional contributing taxpayer, and because she wanted other women to emulate her achievements, she used her experience as a dominant argument. However, in voicing frustration against what she perceives as political apathy and women’s inability to participate in the way she did, she becomes guilty of perpetuating stereotypes. In essence, she talks multiculturalism while living assimilation.

As we saw in Chapter 4, some diaspora women participate in politics in unorthodox ways that those who measure political participation by English proficiency fail to acknowledge. This demonstrates the women of this study are distinct and their diverse experience in political participation is meaningful. Even among those who are part of the same generation.

### **We Vote for the Tory Party: the Outliers**

In this section I will demonstrate that although the respondents have been fight against inequality and discriminations, paradoxically, some participants reproduced the same discourse through discriminating against Polish immigrants, and despite the usual heterogeneity among Somalis, their political views are different. There were two young women among the respondents whose party preference and political ideology stood in opposition to all other respondents. Two friends, Sulekha and Ifrah, voiced a different view about the Labour party and multiculturalism. Sulekha, an entrepreneur planning to start her own business in

telecommunication, and Ifrah, unemployed, claimed that in 2010 they decided to vote for the Conservative Party rather than the Labour party.

According to them, it was by their common political ideology that the friendship developed three years ago. Sulekha stated that she met Ifrah, when a political debate was arranged among a small group of young Muslim immigrants via a social media platform.

Both Ifrah and Sulekha stated their dissatisfaction with multiculturalism and described it as compartmentalization. Ifrah indicated that multiculturalism separates different ethnics into different boxes and according to her “the government instead of promoting multicultural policies should create systems in which different ethnic cultures converge to form a collective sociopolitical culture”.

I first met Sulekha at Southhall Mall where, as part of my research, I observed and interviewed women who shopped or lived in West London. She was promoting her business venture. At first when approached, Sulekha did not want to participate in my study. I did not insist but gave her my phone number and told her that if she changes her mind, please call in the next two weeks because soon I had to return to Minneapolis. A couple of days later she called and was willing to participate and asked if her friend could join us and perhaps be interviewed as well. I agreed and made it clear to Sulekha that I would interview them separately, which was not a problem for Sulekha. I became curious as to why she had changed her mind.

I arrived at Sulekha’s home in late afternoon. Sulekha greeted me at the door and welcomed me in as she led me to the living room. The television was tuned to Universal Television where a Somali program was airing news from Somalia. Sulekha quickly turned off the TV and said “my mother was watching it.”

Sulekha lives with her mother and two siblings in a three bathroom flat. I learned later that her father passed away three years ago. As soon as I sat down, Sulekha excused herself and minutes later she appeared carrying a tray loaded with Somali tea and other delicacies. With her were two other women, her friend, Ifrah, and Sulekha's mother, Uluma. Sulekha introduced me to the women saying: "this is Habon the interviewer from Minneapolis." Sulekha poured tea and said "I hope you don't mind if we follow Somali guest etiquette by first having tea." I nodded that was fine, and after we finished the tea and cookies and Sambus (stuffed pastries), Uluma and Ifrah left the room and I started the interview. Before I got to the main questions I asked Sulekha why she changed her mind. Sulekha responded "because you are not from here and the probability of meeting you again in London circles is small." I asked her to elaborate and she explained that the few Somalis who are aware of her political views avoid her. She did not want to give an interview to someone who lives in London and could possibly make her political opinions public. I told Sulekha that both my personal and research ethics would prevent me from divulging her name and the interview contents even if I was a Londoner.

Sulekha articulated a political view, shared by Ifrah, that the Labour Party is not willing to take a strong stand against mass migration to the UK. They both started voting for the Conservative party because in Sulekha's words "too many immigrants are coming into the UK and the Labour party is unable to stop it." Sulekha and Ifrah's breaking point, which prefaced their change, was the influx of Polish migrants to Britain. Sulekha reported that she used to be an activist in the Labour party who lamented to her borough's councilors and other party leaders about the massive migration from European countries. Their response was that the Labour Party welcomes diversity and immigrants "such as yourself." Sulekha's continued opposition to this wave of immigration aggravated many of her old friends with the Labour party because she is an

immigrant herself. She stated “I don’t have anything against immigrants. But there’s a difference between deserving immigrants and undeserving immigrants.” Both Sulekha and Ifrah have been living in London more than 20 years and came with their family as refugees. They believed they were “deserving immigrants” because of their refugee status due to the civil war in Somalia. Ifrah said:

My parents moved to London because they were genuine asylum seekers. They decided to leave when Somalia collapsed and they felt their lives were in danger not because of economic impact and a shortage of jobs. European immigrants, especially the Polish immigrants, are coming to London to find jobs and are driving down wages...they are not refugees and this is unacceptable (Ifrah, London).

Sulekha remarked:

I feel multiculturalism is not helping immigrants because it separates and disconnects us leaving us to compete with other groups for resources. Also immigrants are so focused in maintaining their traditions that they don’t even care what is happening here. My mother knows more about Somali politics than British politics because she only watches and trusts Somali news. Remember when you came, the Somali national news was on, yet it is Britain that is taking care of her...this is what multiculturalism has done to us. That is why I voted for the Conservative Party because they are the ones who are going to confront this (Sulekha, London).

Her statement reveals that multiculturalism is seen to contribute to ethnic self-segregation to the extent that it provides the sociopolitical conditions for ethnic groups to repudiate Britain. Sulekha and Ifrah are echoing the position of many critics of the multiculturalism model (Barry, 2001; Huntington, 2004), who contend that the approach creates entrenchment of separate communities with eroding trust and cohesion as the consequence. They consider multiculturalism the cause of Britain’s myriad social ills and not the solution.

I found their position surprising because of their Somali immigrant background. Sulekha, in her manners as hostess, demonstrated a distinct appreciation of traditional Somali hospitality

practices and honored those traditions. Because Sulekha and her family treated me with great kindness and respect, I observed that Sulekha is proud of her origin and thought she would be eager to make it part of London's vibrant and cosmopolitan society. Therefore, I assumed her to be someone who is sympathetic to the multicultural approach and would lean toward a political party that advances diversity. I shared with Sulekha my surprise and asked her how she reconciles these seeming contradictory facts. She responded, "This is my private life; it does not have anything to do with policies that affirm cultural differences and assume that I am the same as all other Somali." It is clear that Sulekha is making a distinction between multiculturalism in the public and private spheres. For her multiculturalism is acceptable as long as it is confined to the private sphere and not applied to the allocation of resources. Her view is in line with theorists such as Rex (1986), who has proposed an ideal multicultural society as one that confines cultural diversity to a private sphere so all citizens will benefit from equality of opportunity in the public sphere.

It is important to note that these two young diasporas are also making a distinction between refugees and immigrants. The argument that refugees deserve acceptance in ways that economic migrants do not is a dilemma because the source of injustice and human suffering is not always easy to quantify. They are inferring that the plight of the refugee is more serious than that of the economic migrant. Pursuing this distinction allows them to see their position as worthy to becoming a fully accepted member within the British society. They have taken hold of the authoritarian values and reject others whose status does not count as much as their own refugee status. Sulekha and Ifrah believe this difference presents the prospect of creating separation between immigrants and a social hierarchy of deserving and undeserving which becomes yet again discrimination now based upon immigration status.

Despite these views on immigration dynamics and the attempt to view economic migrants as undesirable members, the general public does not consider migration status as a determinant factor. There are suggestions that Britons are against immigration in general; what counts as a reason for the public to accept or reject immigrants is the social proximity of races and cultures to their own race and culture (Ford, 2007; Lewis, 2005).

I believe the concept of acceptance or rejection is subjective. This holds true especially for the participants of my study as their different forms of identity further affect their opinions on issues such as politics. In the next section I will address nonpolitical factors to vote that some respondents reported.

### **Electoral Participation and Party Choice: Minneapolis Respondents**

Minneapolis respondents demonstrated familiarity with the ideological positions of liberalism and conservatism and the political parties that espouse these ideologies. All respondents claimed to vote for the Democratic Party and recognize it as the liberal party with forward thinking progressive policies. They claimed identification with the Democratic Party, and this influenced their voting behavior as they perceived that Democrats support new ideas and new Americans. By contrast, the Republican Party was viewed by the respondents as close-minded and showing a preference for a homogenous society.

While there was similarity in the party preference and voting choice, two determinants emerged regarding why a vote was cast. There were those who use their vote to express their ideological position, in other words those who care about subjective representation along the lines of issues and policy, and those who saw the vote in terms of power building and sought descriptive representation using their vote to elect legislators from the same background as themselves.

For example, Beydan, the activist I introduced earlier, explained her ideological orientation's influence on her voting:

I vote for the democrats, because you know, I don't want to have a conservative administration that would change immigration law so they can favor certain groups and exclude other such as Muslims. Also conservatives have a rigid stance on women's rights. Don't get me wrong I am an observant Muslim -I am not pro-abortion but I think it is up to women to decide what is best for them (Beydan, Minneapolis).

Carawelo, student and very interested in politics, votes a straight Democratic ticket. She explained her voting choice as:

I vote for Democrats to defeat Republicans and their politics that uses Muslims and immigration as a wedge issue. During election time all they talk is terrorism and immigrants. It is upsetting that they forget that America is a land of immigrants...democrats seem that they like more diversity and newer ideas, they still believe in America's migration history and they are willing to give new Americans an opportunity to be part of the country. Conservatives instead are controlling, assimilationists and have a repressive mentality (Carawelo, Minneapolis).

In a similar fashion, others related democrats to open mindedness and republicans to narrow mindedness. For example, Ilhan, described the reason she casts ballot for the Democratic Party in this way:

Republican Party is getting more and more extreme. I think some of them are really hell-bent racist. They see African Americans and other ethnic minorities as cheaters and fraudulent people to the point that they fought hard to introduce the Voter ID Laws in Minnesota but they lost thanks to our hard work and activism. I was one of the people that went to many Somali organizations to inform them about the harm of this law so on Election Day they can make an educated choice (Ilhan, Minneapolis).

For these respondents, their progressive orientation had direct impact on their voting choices. This orientation had to do with a notion of enduring inequality and a perception that conservative policy initiatives are detrimental to Blacks, women and Muslims. Although some of the policy attribution to the Republican Party may appear extreme the respondents' vision is not unreasonable. For example, the Republican Party has been trying to pass new voting



restrictions and other obstacles that disproportionately affect immigrants, minorities and low-income voters. These includes “photo ID laws, proof of citizenship, restrictions on voter registration, restrictions on early/absentee voting, actions making it harder to restore voting rights” (Norden & Weiser, 2011, p. 2-3). The 2000 presidential election irregularities, such as polls closing while people were still in line, that denied many Black citizens the opportunity to vote is an example of modern day disfranchisement (Coll, 2011).

Minnesota was one of these States where the Republican Party has tried to introduce these laws. In April 2012, the Minnesota House and Senate passed a Republican-backed amendment which proposed a constitutional referendum to require voters to provide photo identification (ID). The referendum was then placed on the November 2012 general election ballot. Many thought the attempt was to intimidate and create barriers for young and immigrant voters. Since this group was likely to vote Democrat, the legislation was seen by many to be a method for suppressing turnout and disenfranchising members of these groups who often do not have a valid ID. However, Minnesotans rallied to vote “no” and the legislation was stopped.

Republican Party pundits often appear to have doubts about the loyalty of Muslim Americans toward the nation. Moreover, there are some republicans who espouse the concept of Muslims that relies on Huntington’s (1993) idea of a “clash of civilizations.” Just recently, September 2015, the 2016 Republican Presidential frontrunners, Ben Carson and Donald Trump engaged in anti-Muslim rhetoric to appeal to the extreme fringe of their party.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Republicans' Muslim 'problem'. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/21/opinions/bergen-muslim-religious-tolerance/> . Carson's attacks on Muslims worry some GOP elders- <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/982c5ab077a04017bdfb0f167febb668/trump-and-carsons-attacks->

In 2008 and 2012 attempts to delegitimize and to cast him as an outsider, the then candidate Obama, was often called Muslim. In 2010, Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, and other prominent Republicans vociferously opposed the proposed Cordoba House initiative near ground zero in New York (Kumar, 2012), igniting protests that have become a more widespread disapproval of Muslim institutions in the United States.

In the local context there were also cases with provocative and hostile languages formulated by some Republican Party leaders in Minnesota against Muslims. The most extreme was launched by Jack Whitley, the then chairman of the Big Stone County Republican Party who in November 2014 posted in his Facebook account series of hateful posts and called for Muslim extermination.<sup>6</sup> Therefore the respondents' claim of voting for democrats to fight against multiple forms of oppression perpetuated by some leaders in the Republican Party both in the local and national contexts has merit.

The respondents' active participation in electoral processes demonstrates first that they understand what it means to be liberal or conservative and can identify the two parties who are affiliated with these ideologies. Second, it shows how the Somali diaspora is increasingly becoming visible constituencies where a complex interplay of race, religion and perhaps gender sets an agenda for their politics. In other words, what initially was a struggle for acceptance by many Somalis who desired to add their identities to the social fabric of Minneapolis is becoming a demand for equality. As mentioned earlier, young immigrants believe this equalization can be

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<sup>6</sup> Big Stone Co. GOP chair: Muslims are terrorists, we should 'frag 'em'-  
<http://www.startribune.com/big-stone-co-gop-chair-muslims-are-terrorists-we-should-frag-em/283369391/>.

hastened through participation in politics and the building of political power that allows them to influence and shape the sociopolitical structure.

### **Electoral Politics and Power Building**

Almost all respondents reported that beside their support to and affiliation with the Democratic Party their voting have had additional aim: that of building power so they can have one of their own in public offices. They explain that Minneapolis' elected legislatures are not the mirror image of the changing demographic population they are supposed to represent. Thus their voting power should change the status quo. Saxarla said:

It is true that compared to other immigrant communities in Minneapolis we have made progress in local politics but this is not enough because we represent a large portion of the Minneapolis population. We need someone from our community that can represent the interests of Somalis in Minneapolis (Saxarla, Minneapolis).

Many within the community hold the same view and would like to have Somali lawmakers in the local legislature. The difficulty with obtaining descriptive representation is in gaining an accurate number for the Somali population in Minneapolis. Somalis often estimate their own population as around 80,000 people. However, there is a discrepancy between the number approximated by the community and the 30,000 Somalis counted by the Census Bureau (2010). One explanation is the nomadic lifestyle of Somalis where “homeless” means staying as a guest but not on the lease or officially living at that address. Regardless of the numbers, it appears that descriptive representation matters for Somalis. Descriptive representation is the relationship that an individual has with elected officials with whom they share a group identity, and it implies that a representative acts for the interests of the group (Busche, 2010). Thus, Saxarla and others like Nimco envision that descriptive representations can lead to better policy outcomes for the Somali community. Nimco said:

A Somali legislator can advocate better policy for the community...Minneapolis is becoming a multicultural city and this means that we should have more diverse politicians that represent that entire population. I advocate for more Somalis legislators because we are the largest Muslim community in Minneapolis and we have priorities that a non-Somali legislator may not understand (Nimco, Minneapolis).

When probed about what these priorities were, Nimco mentioned law enforcement targeting Somalis, women's hijab always contested and in some cases required women to remove it so they can comply with the law and work places have designated prayer rooms. She added:

A few years ago a Republican legislator attempted to introduce a bill which would ban the wearing of hijab on driver's license photos and state ID cards because according to the bill's author law enforcement officials need to see the uncovered head to identify people. This demonstrates the level of ignorance as law makers don't understand the needs and religious rights of Muslim Americans (Nimco, Minneapolis).

Others also exhibit similar views and talked about the relationship of descriptive representation and fair policies. Warsan highlighted how Somali populated neighborhoods need a Somali representative who can develop opportunities for economic and social advance.

Indeed the need to incorporate Somali diaspora into Minneapolis community politics has been a recurrent theme. Riwan explained this in stating "we [Somalis] understand the interplay of politics, resources and equity and our electoral power is commanding the attention of many in the state" (Riwan, 25, student Minneapolis). To Riwan's point, the Somali community is fairly new to Minneapolis, yet in the last 10 years it has gained political power. In 2006, Minnesotan voters elected Keith Ellison, the first African American Muslim, to serve Minnesota's 5th Congressional District in the US House of Representatives. The Somali community as well as the news media (MSNBC) claims that Somali's votes played a determinant role in Representative Ellison's election.

Four years later, Hussein Samatar a Somali-Minnesotan was elected to the Minneapolis School Board in a district where Somali students and other minorities are the majority of the

school age children. Samatar was the first Somali to have been elected to an official position in Minnesota. Many of his voters, particularly the Somali community, were relying on him to help parents and schools meet the educational needs of minority students especially students from non-English speaking households (Yuen, 2010).

Both of these election results suggest that Somali Minnesotans have exerted political influence. Because there is a lack of significant data about Somali diaspora political involvement, it is not possible to fully measure the impact and pattern of Somali electorates at the national, regional, and local levels.

Yet, there are clear signs that the community is aware of its political clout and maturity. In the last few years mainstream politicians have sought the Somali community's endorsement. And the community has been clever in bargaining their vote, though at times clan division can muddle the outcome and prevent the development of a unified front. However, like the above respondents and others explained, the Somali community is seeking more visibility and representation which translates in drawing Somali candidates into the political process, therefore achieving the ultimate goal of transforming Somali outsiders into political insiders.

In taking advantage of the legislative process for redistricting, the Somali diaspora political agenda is taking shape. For example, the population increase captured in the 2010 Census count presented Somalis a good opportunity when the process of redistricting came up. This coupled with loss of a Somali candidate in a state senate race two years prior prompted the community in 2013 to rally behind a campaign to redefine ward boundaries. The lobby was successful and the redistricting combined four neighborhoods creating a larger ward inhabited mainly by Somalis. This shrewd political move allowed the community to concentrate the Somali vote as much as possible to a single district and created political leverage. It gave the

opportunity for the election of the first Somali city councilman representing the newly created Sixth Ward. Rao (2013), when announcing city council Abdi Warsame's victory, wrote:

His landslide victory in the Sixth Ward race signals the rising political influence of Somali-Americans in Minneapolis and offers a window into the changing demographics that also swept into office the council's first members of Hmong and Mexican descent. But Warsame's win was different from that of the other immigrant candidates, Blong Yang and Alondra Cano, in that he relied more heavily on bringing members of his cultural community out to the polls — some for the first time (Rao, 2013).

Minneapolis, like many other American metropolises, is becoming familiar with immigrant political capacity. Yet immigrants must still deal with challenges and full acceptance is still a long way off. They are allowed entry through the window but not through the door. Nevertheless, many, like my respondents both in Minneapolis and London, are igniting changes in their local communities and have been participating politically that begins with voting and goes beyond to running and being elected to represent the citizens. In the examples cited above, the respondents demonstrated that they care about voting and that have knowledge of politics and current events in their cities.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I attempted to underscore that most of the 1.5 generation of Somali diaspora did not know of their Muslim Blackness until they realized their “otherness” in Minneapolis and London. Growing up in these two cities, getting education in these two locations and speaking with accentless English did not help them to achieve full social acceptance. Their parents, though they were mindful about possible challenges in the destination country, did not have any experience with the social context of race based discrimination (perhaps they are more versed in tribe and clan issues). Nor were they knowledgeable about the inferences of certain biases and the effect of the interrelatedness of certain social conditions (poverty and crime), which became a measurement to determine societal worth in Western

countries, let alone that geographic clusters are synonymous with ghettoization. Their only neighborhood before immigrating was one of high density Blackness. In other words, their upbringing dealt with other sort of issues, and they were unable to prepare their children to deal with prejudice. Children were left to face discrimination shaped by pre-existing attributions of race and were not insulated from stereotypes or trained to deal with racism. Despite these difficulties, the younger generation managed to create counter hegemonic citizenship practices and built social networks that can help them achieve equality.

The chapter outlined various social networks, both ethnic and non-ethnic, constructed by the 1.5 generation respondents in Minneapolis and London. All these social networks offer fields of belonging, and interaction, and some respondents participate in several of them. In the course of developing nonethnic social connectedness, young respondents experienced stratification based on the intersecting multiple identities of their gender, race, and religion, and the various effects of these identities on their access to resources. They realized that political consciousness does not arise from a single social identity in isolation from all others, but rather from the individual's multiple, simultaneous, and intersecting characteristics. This understanding challenged them to cultivate strategies for political engagement which required shifting, adjusting, and strategically positioning identities. The privileging of one identity in some political contexts and an alternate identity in other contexts becomes a strategic tool for persisting given that, as Crenshaw (1991) has explained, "the need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment" (p. 1252). But instead, the younger respondents' efforts in engaging with non-ethnic social relationships is to change this "intersectional disempowerment" into a tool for empowerment, solidarity, and coalition-building. The chapter also demonstrated that the

younger generation's respondents are involved in electoral and that majority of them prefer progressive political party.



## Chapter 9: Conclusion

This study was motivated by the paucity of research on diaspora women, particularly Muslim Black diaspora women and political participation. The few studies that have showed interest in migrant women and political participation do classify their participants as immigrants. Whereas, the previous literature about diasporas and political involvement are dominated by the negative influence of diaspora politics. Often diaspora groups are viewed as very powerful forces harboring mistrust and exacerbating conflicts through the provision of remittance and political support or intervention with little risk to them due to their distance (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2006). According to these studies, diasporas are still living with the memories and consequences of internal conflicts, grievances and politics of the motherland therefore diasporas have taken major roles in augmenting conflicts (Collier & Hoeffler 2001; Lyons 2004).

Additionally, researchers of diaspora and political engagement tend to reinforce androcentric biases toward male participation and male dominance in formal spheres of diasporic politics. Yet as Clifford (1994) reminds us “[d]iasporic experiences are always already gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diaspora cultures *and diasporas* and *diaspora politics* to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences” (p. 313, emphasis added).

In this dissertation I took a thoroughly unorthodox interest in diaspora and political participation as I investigated diaspora women’s involvement in politics both in the country of origin and their new country. The goal of this research was to answer four questions: (a) Do Somali diaspora women participate in politics in their new countries: the United States and United Kingdom? If yes: what and who influences their political participation? (b) Do Somali diaspora women participate in transnational politics? (c) What are the differences and

similarities between levels and types of political participation between Somali women in the US and the UK? (d) What are the social resources and networks that influence the political participation of Somali diaspora women?

My dissertation compared two Somali diaspora communities: Minneapolis and London, and two generations: first and 1.5 generation. And the interviews revealed a spectrum of opinions and experiences regarding political participation and adjustments to the new country. My work suggested that it is hard to understand the ways in which Somali diaspora women relate to politics and to their political life, without also knowing the particular ways they express their concerns and passion for their community. For that I examined closely the life stories of twenty Somali diaspora women and analyzed how these women create new counter hegemonic citizenship practices across boundaries of gender, ethnicity, religion and race. The respondents each shared with me their story before and after migration, their struggles, their hopes and expectations and their level of political participation in Minneapolis and London. These stories were compelling and I believe they ring true for many other diaspora women who experienced losses and various types of exclusion.

In the remainder of this brief concluding chapter, I will summarize and identify the main findings of my study and present my contribution to the study of diaspora women and political participation, which I outlined earlier in my literature review. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of my research project as it has turned out in the form of this thesis, and I suggest some possible areas for future research.

## **Two Communities Two Cities**

While the political projects and identifications vary, the resettled countries/cities are a central site for articulating these political project. I argued that in Minneapolis and London the Somali diaspora has become a phenomenon often discussed in the media and viewed by many as a threat to the new society. Somalis experienced multiple practices of exclusion from the state and mainstream society. This is similar to other studies that reported how racial discrimination has been an enduring feature of the social system of Minneapolis and London (Abdi, 2012; Saggar, 2012). Somalis faced diminished opportunity in the labor market, negative portrayal in the mass media, housing segregation as well as experiencing the neglect of both student and parent needs by the school system. In the UK, Somalis have been called the “invisible community” by which their existence has been basically denied (Harris, 2004). Thus, my study’s cross city perspective shined light on the relation between different ethnicization and racialization. The consequence of the policy process in these locations imposes enormous burdens on diaspora communities who are denied a multitude of opportunities and benefits because of their race, religion, and mischaracterization of their cultural heritage. While the lives and fates of Somalis in Minneapolis and London intersect, in many ways they diverge from one another. The study demonstrated that London’s multiethnic lifestyle and the British approach of multiculturalism facilitated the respondents from London finding comfort in their Muslim identity. On the other hand, pragmatic manifestations of a policy of multiculturalism which allocates resources by ethnicity, rather than clan, created a quandary for many Somalis, as clan power wrestling still continues in the diaspora locations. When considering the pros versus cons, London respondents found with multiculturalism it is easier to establish role models for political aspiration and participation within the Muslim community.

In Minneapolis, the fear of being assimilated into American society and accepting American life and pop culture caused Somalis to develop strategies to preserve their tradition while adding their culture to the fabric of Minneapolis. In many ways, Somali Minneapolitans consider themselves pioneers of multiculturalism in the midst of the American assimilation mindset. However, the respondents from Minneapolis had to rely on mainstream politicians for role models as they lacked the advantage of their Londoner counterparts whose Muslim role models helped them to find their place in local politics. Nevertheless, in both locations the search for justice, respect, and representation in racially hierarchical political systems established the fundamental strategy, orientation, and motivation of Somali diaspora women's political engagement. Although the dissertation addressed some aspects of the integration process of the Minneapolis and London, this was not the scope of the thesis.

### **Participation in National and Local Politics**

In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I showed the Somali diaspora women's political expression both in electoral politics and protest mobilization. I also examined critical gender aspects in how politics is defined, what strategies Somali women use to generate political participation, and how culture and gender interact in the political empowerment of the diaspora communities. My finding argued that diaspora women play an active role in organizing and articulating their subject positions and political views sometimes as women of Somali background, other times as diaspora women; or they may highlight their religious identity or gender or ethnic and political stance.

Politics has been largely defined as activities within and pertaining to the official institutions of state, the mechanisms of partisan mutual adjustment or the authoritative allocation of resources (Norris, 2002; Welzel & Deutsch, 2012). I demonstrated that focusing only on these

definitions eventually results in concealing the political reality that is practiced by diaspora women who experience othering and exclusion and want to relocate their cultural background. I offered an alternative understanding of political participation that is transnational, inclusive, and local enough to capture the vicissitudes of political practices of Somali diaspora women. I reported unique forms of political activism among Somali diaspora women.

### **Transnational Politics and Diaspora Women**

I found that the diaspora experience has had a positive effect on women's political participation. Moreover, there is the possibility that this capacity is permanent and not limited to the Minneapolis and London contexts. First generation Somali diaspora foster transnationalism. This notion of transnational diaspora also embraces the pervasiveness and importance of mass media and communication practices (telephone, radio, and social media), which are sites where national and transnational political ideologies and cultural narrative or counter narrative are shared and disseminated. This transnational character has facilitated women's long-distance connections beyond Minneapolis and London, connections that impacted family members, communities, women's organizations, and the Somali government. Diaspora women are taking part in the discursive politics of Somalia, bringing to the forefront gender and socioeconomic inequality as a political and human rights problem. My work underscores the power of the first generation Somali women to work within the patriarchal clan cultural structure that gives them opportunity to participate in transnational politics while challenging those practices that limit and undermine contributions by females. I focused on what this cohort is doing with/to the clan power structure while acknowledging attempts by the clan male dominated transnational political power to exclude women.

My research showed that this involvement in homeland politics encourages diaspora's political incorporation and engagement in political mobilization of their host country. Due to the politicization of international terrorism and "war on terror," diaspora members are aware that the politics of Somalia is connected to, if not controlled by, the politics in America and Britain, thus heightening the importance of their dual citizenships and mobilization efforts in Minneapolis and London. Furthermore, the potential threat of radicalization within the diaspora community has become an issue in Britain and America which has led to ethnic and religious profiling of Somalis (Waters, 2013) and has pushed the community to learn to foster pro-Somali sentiment across the diaspora locations. The interplay of global local politics requires incorporation in the countries of resettlement; thus, transnationalism and incorporation are not contradictory or exclusive, but complementary processes (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004).

This discovery of Somali diaspora women challenging transnational male politics and pushing their presence into the transnational field is novel. For one, in Somalia, women have largely been marginalized from high level decision-making processes and my dissertation is showing that diaspora women are strongly emerging in the transnational political domain which has in the past been reserved for men. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 2, previous studies on immigrant women omit that women are engaged in transnational politics (Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998) and diaspora women and transnational politics (Salih 2010; Mojab & Gorman 2007), which have focused on formal women organizations and feminist group advocacy political power that stand for the rights of diaspora women in their home country. To the contrary, my work shows diaspora women engage in transnational politics and develop an informal collective using cultural and religious capital and are coming together to dismantle the traditional male transnational political power.

## **Generation Matters**

Unlike other studies that examined women and political participation which tend to lump together all migrant women (Fisher, 2002; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Read, 2007; Takhar 2007), my findings illustrated the complexity that impacts the Somali diaspora woman's political engagement. The study compared first generation respondents, mature women who have lived in refugee camps and resided in various countries before settling in Minneapolis or London, and have a strong desire to return to Somalia though they have been settled in Minneapolis/ London for more than 20 years. They enjoy the privilege of having American or British passports and would never cut their ties to the host country and give up their new citizenship because, it gives them additional voice and political power when getting into transnational politics.

The 1.5 generation grew up in Minneapolis and London and thus identify themselves as American or British and their activism is more aligned to their mainstream counterparts. They are confronting the status quo as they experience it in much the same way other minorities have had to face political challenges. They resonate with #BlackLivesMatter. Their agenda is often civil rights, immigration rights, fair labor laws, and they lack the Somali political agenda that the older generation has regarding the state of politics back home. This illustrates the difference in the respondents' notions of belonging, political motivations, and modes of engagement.

Significantly, what they have in common is the challenges of fitting into a society that considers them outsiders and the acceptance of the role of champion versus victim. Important to understanding of how political participation is exercised and experienced are the strategies and methods developed by each group of women in response to oppression discourses such as Islamophobia and racism, as well as the relations developed between these groups as they navigate the nuances of the receiving context. These points stand at the center of this study and

demonstrated how these women, as they get involved in politics, are attempting to make changes in their situations and their community but in different ways.

### **Social Capital Matter**

The rise of social capital as a major explanatory factor in political participation (Putnam, 2000) indicated the need to explore how it influences the Somali women's aspiration and experiences in politics. My findings suggest that participation in the social sphere, such as in various groups or institutions like mosques, ethnic associations, student associations, traditional women's groups, and trade unions is politically significant. Such participation serves to prepare Somali diaspora women for political participation in several ways. My work highlighted that for many of the respondents both ethnic and non-ethnic organizations provide the context in which the civic virtues that are so vital to political participation are nurtured. Organizations were also the context in which diaspora women have articulated their own identities and developed a sense of belonging.

### **Postcolonialism, Intersectionality and Religio-Cultural Approach**

Because diaspora women and politics addresses questions of race, gender, and outsider status, it is inherently postcolonial and intersectional terrain. Both Spivak (1996) and Mohanty (2003) have described the challenges of non-Western women's self-representation in colonial structures of power both inside and outside western countries. Crenshaw (1991) considered the multiple threats of discrimination when an individual's identities overlap with a number of minority classes.

In my study, I used intersectionality and postcolonialism in several ways. First, where it has largely been ignored in the literature of diaspora politics, I demonstrated that in the research of diaspora women and political participation, intersectionality can be used to mobilize for social



justice, as respondents navigate identities that register the effects of differentiated and asymmetrical power. This has allowed them to anticipate and enact new social relations grounded in multiple axes of intersecting. I argued that they deploy intersectionality as a means for getting through the various oppressive systems in society, but also as a way of collecting all their identity into movement for social change.

I followed a postcolonial feminists' approach and analyzed respondents' narratives of what it means to be African, Muslim, women, and diaspora subjects in Minneapolis and London, in order to trace the ways in which belonging or exclusion influence their participation in politics. On the basis of these narratives, I avoided homogenizing the experience of the respondents. I faced head-on the challenge multiple hegemony presented as it clearly shaped what these women recounted as background experiences to their entry into civic involvement. In showing that some respondents' political engagement unfolded within the contexts of Somali culture and Islam, my research challenges long-standing West-centrism on the aspect of politics and culture from the perspective of "the other." This counters the belief of liberal feminists (Okin, 1999), who warned that the imported "exotic culture and religion" of immigrant women is not suitable for Western soil, thus the demand of assimilation.

By presenting a religio-cultural approach and arguing that Somali culture and Islam are able to coexist in a multicultural pattern of power with the West, I am not implying that Minneapolis and London have somehow overcome racism and Islamophobia, rather that diaspora women have agency and desire to connect elements of their past and present thus creating tools for political action.

I am aware that a postcolonial approach raises questions. The arduousness of using the term *postcolonial* comes from the fact that colonialism has not ended. The legacies of

colonialism continue to shape immigration narratives and policies that often draw boundaries between those who are included as members of the community and entitled to respect, protection, and rights, and those who are excluded and, thus, not entitled to recognition and rights. Therefore colonialist practices have not ended nor have we moved past them as current policies continue to act in the hierarchy of othering. What is significant, for me, about the postcolonial approach is that it creates disturbance in assumptions held by many mainstream citizens of Minneapolis and London about culture and politics.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research**

Finally, I would like to conclude this chapter and this dissertation by presenting the limitations and strengths of this study as I see them, and to propose possible future developments in the literature on the Somali diaspora and diaspora women and political engagement.

In my judgment, my study has various strengths. It highlights the importance of gender on the topic of the diaspora and political participation. My study puts the topic of the transnational political involvement of Somali diaspora women Minneapolis and London in the context of the Somalis' presence in these two locations. It addresses the development of alternative social networks as survival strategies in the politics of Minneapolis and London. I have proposed an alternative understanding of political participation. I opted to use multiple theoretical perspectives to clarify and convey my case following different epistemological backgrounds, connecting different levels of analysis and different methods of research. This decision allowed me to provide the setting in which Somali diaspora women experience both challenges and opportunities to live and practice citizenship, and at the same time participate in transnational politics. As I have demonstrated, generation, refugee, and historical contingencies play an important role in the formation and development of individual and cohort identity and the

consequent political engagement and mobilization; additionally, a detailed analysis of the communities and of the networks that are intersected within them allows me to avoid the trap of considering Somali diaspora in static and homogeneous terms, and instead to appreciate the internal differences of the Somali diaspora, as was evident in the case of the Somali diaspora women. Finally, among the strengths of this research is the decision of studying, simultaneously, two locations and two generation's political involvement.

The main limitation of my dissertation lies in the conventional pattern of recruitment of the participants. In Chapter 3, I discussed that I did not recruit my respondents through a balanced number of ethnic and nonethnic organizations and routes. I heavily relied on Somali ethnic organization and networks. If I had used nonethnic routes, I could access differentiated nature, role, and resources of non-Somali contacts. A second limitation of this study was that the sample comprised all women, therefore representing a women-only viewpoint. Thus, additional research is needed to investigate Somali diaspora men's level of political engagement in these two cities and whether they use a similar religio-culture approach..

A third limitation was that since the majority of the respondents opted to not talk about clan in local politics, it is unknown whether clan was an issue or resource for the respondents' political participation in these two locations. Future research should explore whether Somali clan culture interferes in the local and national political engagement across generations and gender.

Last, a limitation of the research was that participants were from two very different cities. London is much larger than Minneapolis; is a cosmopolitan city with a more demographically diverse and larger Muslim population than Minneapolis. Thus, London accommodates the needs of its Muslim citizens. Instead, Minneapolis grapples with ways to accommodate Muslim

minorities. It will be important in future research to look into cities that are more similar in diaspora composition to better determine diaspora settlement experiences.

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## Appendix A

### History of Somalia

The colonization of Somalia and the annexation of its territory began in 1885, when the Berlin conference led to the foreign powers partitioning of Africa. Upon the consent of the European powers, England, Italy, and France started to divide Somalia and erected artificial boundaries. Consequently, the Somali peninsula was divided into five territories, and this initiated the process of inventing separate colonial identities for each of the territories: French Somaliland (now the Republic of Djibouti); Italian Somaliland; Ogaden, controlled by Ethiopia, and the Northern Frontier Districts of Kenya (both territories initially ruled by Britain and later given to Kenya and Ethiopia); and British Somaliland (Cassanelli, 1982).

Somalis resisted colonialism and its cultural and religious domination. The first insurrection against colonialism occurred in 1899, when Somalis sought to liberate the Ogaden territories from Ethiopia. This later became a war against the European colonists and the establishment the Dervish State in the northern region of Somalia. The Dervish State was dominated by the Sunni religion and was headed by Sayid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, a religious figure, who assembled Somali soldiers from across the Horn of Africa to form an army known as the *Derwishes* who were incorruptibly loyal to him. Sayid Mohammed, whom the British referred to as the "Mad Mullah", led a religion-based war of resistance against the Ethiopian and British 'unbelievers', from 1899 to 1920, resulting in the death of nearly 200,000 Somali. Later, from the 1920s to 1930s, Somalis also battled the Italian fascist rule of Mussolini (Slight, 2011).

Colonial social systems have negatively affected Somali women who were mischaracterized as servants or mistresses. This is found both within the written and iconographic materials produced by European colonialists. Women in these records are depicted as naïve, uncivilized individuals indulgent of all forms of sexual immorality (Mitrano Sani, 1933) and shameful behaviors which thus rendered the white Italian woman as superior. Beside the desecration of female bodies (ordering women to pose naked) and the loaded racist imageries which reveal the bigoted practices of the colonial structure of power and authority, women became the normative symbol of commodity acquisition by the colonial conquest (Campassi and Segal 1983). This portrait of Somali woman, like many other imperial descriptions of Africa (Landau and Kaspin, 2002), created a distortion by portraying Somali woman as only passive.

In Somalia, oral tradition was used to pass on the history and tradition of the patriarchal system. Women's roles were defined and valued in the nomadic cultural practices as communities depended upon their contributions and strengths for survival. However, the colonists' occupation destroyed the essence of the existing system of equity and replaced the traditional gender system with a Western version of patriarchy which emphasized power not honor. This redefinition by the colonialists played a decisive role in the reduction of women's values to the level of mere domestics.

The colonial ravaging lasted until 1960, but not before it completely altered the political and social structure of the country. The sultanates of the Somali kingdom were totally dismantled and lost sovereignty as colonial rulers replaced indigenous leaders. After which the British, Italian, and French colonial authorities forcefully combined Somali territories that were once ruled by traditional tribal chieftains (Luling, 2002). During World War II, Italy and

Britain fought over possession of Somalia, and when Italy lost the war, the British army took over the administration of the Italian colony until 1950. The British, as a result of agreements between the victors and the United Nations (UN), returned Somalia to the Italians to administer until 1960 with the stipulation that they would prepare the former colony for independence. While direct colonial rule ended in Somalia in 1960, its legacy still has a far-reaching effect on Somalis as post-independent Somalia adopted the colonizers more centralized and authoritarian administrative system of government. As I'll demonstrate in the next section, Somalia's post-independent political system has been characterized by clan based discriminations that excluded and marginalized the minority clans and sub-clans.

### **Independence Period**

The Somali nation as it is known today is the result of the merging of former British Somaliland, which obtained its independence from Britain on June 26, 1960, and the former United Nations Trusteeship of Somalia, administered by Italy (1950-1960) which was granted independence on July 1, 1960.

After the Southern and Northern Somali regions were unified into a National Assembly, they elected Adan Abdulla Osman as the country's first head of state, and he nominated Abdirrashid Ali Sharmarke as Somalia's first Prime Minister. Adan Abdulla governed Somalia from 1960 until 1967. Abdirrashid Ali Sharmarke succeeded him and led the country for two years until his assassination in October 15, 1969. On October 21, 1969, General Siyad Barre seized power of the Somali state with a *coupe d'état*, and a new governing body, the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), was formed. The SRC leadership adapted scientific socialism, a system of power associated with socialism which appropriated the theories of Marx, Mao, and

Lenin. Although socialism is said to be contrary to Islamic teachings, the SRC claimed that scientific socialism was commensurate with Islamic values (Samatar, 1988).

In the early years of his administration, President Siyad Barre received favorable marks from the public as he launched campaigns to free the country from poverty, disease, ignorance, tribalism, and gender inequality. But this did not last, as the SRC instituted social inequality by elevating certain sectors of society while suppressing those found in disagreement. In order to hold onto his power Barre relied on mainly three Darod subclans: Marehaan (which was his own clan), Ogadeen and the Dolbahante. This patronage system was referred to as the MOD (Marehan-Ogadeen-Dolbahate).

The Barre regime became increasingly oppressive and violent in the late 1970s through early 1980s, when mass atrocities by his regime increased after the 1977 loss in the territorial war against Ethiopia. President Barre launched this war against Ethiopia as an attempt to reclaim the Ogadeen region for Somalia. The war received almost universal approval among the Somali people, as it was viewed as a step toward potential reunification of all Somali regions, and was the high point of Barre's popularity. This did not last long as Somalia was defeated by the Soviet-supported Ethiopian army. The defeat not only destroyed the hope of Somalia's reunification but caused previously hidden divides to surface. These continue today as the north region calls itself Somaliland and seeks independence while the southern region is called Somalia.

Intense repression in Ogadeen caused large numbers of ethnic Somali to flee this Ethiopian held region and seek refuge in other areas of Somalia. The Barre government's solution to this major humanitarian problem was to organize settlements of Ogadeen refugees in

the Northwest which is Isaq territory. The Isaq clan felt that President Barre's ulterior motive in resettling Ogadeen refugees in their land was to encourage the refugees to claim ownership of the land and to expel the Isaq. Siyad Barre's regime organized armed militias among the refugees, using the excuse of planning to liberate Ogadeen territory but instead the militias used their weapons to intimidate the local population. Armed clashes between the Ogadeen and Isaq erupted, and the government sided with the Ogadeen. This led the Isaq resistance to mount revolts and the rebellion spread over a large area of the Northwest region. The rebels became bolder and engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Barre regime.

In 1981 Somalis living in London became dissidents and formed the Somali National Movement (SNM) with the aim of overthrowing the Barre regime. Barre cracked down on the rebel Somalia National Movement (SNM) and targeted members of the Isaq who had created the group.

In 1988, SNM, launched a guerrilla offensive on various northwestern cities and seized Burco and Hargeysa. As a reprisal, Siyad Barre ordered aerial and artillery bombardment of the cities which had fallen to the SNM rebels (Ambroso, 2002). Infantry forces massacred those fleeing and after the cities were completely destroyed, went into the countryside to annihilate the Isaq. These atrocities contributed to the exile by the Isaq to Great Britain.

The bombing of Hargeysa and Burco came at a high cost to the Barre regime. Not only had the fighting been expensive, but the sympathy towards the SNM and the Isaq clan increasingly attracted threats to Barre's regime by other Somalis. In the following years SNM sought alliances with other clan militias, and along with the United Somali Congress (USC), and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) cooperated in ousting Barre and his administration.

Although a manifesto promising to avoid clan wars was signed by elders as well as religious and political leaders in 1990 (Makinda, 1991), the civil war erupted in 1991, pitting clan against clan and the Somali state collapsed. In the wake of Barre's defeat the SNM decided to abrogate the north/south union of 1960 and declared the Republic of Somaliland an as independent state. In 2012, the southern region of Somalia elected a government which has yet to function fully and is not governing over the Republic of Somaliland.

### **The Status of Women in Post-Colonial Somalia**

Somali women have experienced gender biases not only from colonialists but also by the Somali male population. Although Somali men respect the feminine role of women, they often refuse to accept them as equal individuals. Nonetheless, women have always found ways to be a part of the country's struggle for independence.

Though not widely recognized, Somali women contribute much to the culture and socio-political tapestry of Somalia. Women participated in the anti-colonialist movement and they were active members of the first Somali political party, Somali Youth League. The Somali heroine Hawo Taako, was a member of the SYL when she was assassinated by an Italian sympathizer (Jabril, 2008). Despite the personal risk they faced, this generation of women shaped women's activism by their involvement in the political issues of the day. Their existence as a considerable social force is historically significant for Somalia.

Between the 1960's and mid-seventies, through the beginning of Barre's rule, there was an era of relative socio-political stability in a country trying to discover its political ideology. In this period women lived in an illusion of equality fueled by mixtures of Somali womanism,



feminism (not the ideology but the cultural aspect which was experienced mainly via cinema and magazine), and socialism.

The process of urbanization in the post-Independence period witnessed a new phase and the emergence of an elite. This new group comprised of intellectuals and political leaders, had to distance themselves from the pastoral principles in order to develop a new social system. The new elite's social practices played an important part in pointing the gender discourses in a new direction (Ingiriis 2011).

The urban populace began fostering a culture of class and this permitted educated women to come forward as potential public reformers. Baadiyow (2009) asserts that as a result of the modernist approach, "Somali women gained more power and benefits, including equality in citizenship, voting rights, equal opportunities in the social services and jobs and paid maternity leave" (p:5). Many women felt they had equality with men. They found it acceptable to dress like western movie actresses. In the 1970's the miniskirt made its appearance in Mogadishu as a status symbol. It was not a 'Gloria Steinem' feminist statement of rebellion against moral double standards. Rather it distinguished the wearer as an urbanite and not a Western-style militant feminist.

In the 1960s, although Somali women were aware of the ideas of Western feminist ideology, they also knew that they had to achieve equality by their own terms and actions. During that period women's influence began to surface through the use of expressive mediums. Theater and song became channels to advocate for women's issues and educate the public about equality (Kapteijns & Ali 1999). While women's access to formal leadership positions was still limited, they rose to the top in many professions. For example, women participated in the

medical profession as doctors and nurses. They practiced law, taught in universities and were active members of the national army. Women attempted to initiate debate about gender equality in this relatively democratic context. However systematic equality did not occur because women could not gather enough power to simultaneously affect social customs, political ideals, and gender and clan roles. When in 1969 Somalia entered a new political phase this seemed possible, but for women political leadership roles remains elusive as will be explained in the next section.

### **Women Status in the Barre's Regime**

When General Barre seized power, he introduced a new rhetoric in Somalia, which promised economic developments and social equality. For these reasons, in the early years, many women supported Barre's presidency. Instead Barre turned out to be a dictator who ruled through an authoritarian regime that controlled every aspect of people's lives (Samatar, 1988). For example, the rules changed in the process of elections in that only two ballot boxes were available, the 'pro-Barre' and 'against-Barre'. Voting sites were monitored by heavily armed guards whose intimidation caused no one to cast their vote against the regime. Yet it is under this dictatorship that women's socio-political issues gained additional footing.

Some scholars have asserted that the Barre's regime appeared to be hopeful for women until the late 1970s (Gardner and El Bushra 2004; Foni 1980). This could be because in the early years women found an ally in the new regime as it outlined progressive policies for women as well as for the entire society. One important example was the development of the Women's Education Service, in 1974, later called the Women's Educational Department (WED). WED was a branch of the Ministry of Education and broadly responsible for

implementing and supporting women's empowerment programs. The objective of the government was not only to promote educational equity for women and girls but to further provide women financial self-sufficiency. As Williams Ntiri states, "The principal aim is to make them not only effective mothers and spouses but more active participants in the nation's economy" (Williams Ntiri 1987:2).

Forni (1980) compares the socialist regime's policies and achievements to other women's movements and talks about 'emancipation', and regards this period as "the discovery of woman" (Forni 1980, p: 28). This is because in the fulfillment of this Marxist style of gender equality, Barre's government focused on amending the family law. Thus, in 1975 the first family law with gender provisions was ratified in Somalia (Samatar 1988). Again this was essential for Barre's government as it demonstrated his approval of the Marxist key tenet that the nuclear family was a model of injustice. According to Marxism, man's place as a wage earner institutionalizes his superiority over women and creates class oppression in order to maintain the production of a capitalist system (Engels 1972). In the Somali context, although this attempt to revise family law could be viewed as progress, gender inequality continued as the political changes were not actually implemented within the society (Kapteijs, 1995).

The new family law directly disregarded Islamic law which, alongside with customary law *xeer* guided family matters in Somali society. Barre's government also prohibited the bride dowry and blood compensation *diya*. These changes to traditions were resisted by religious leaders and elders. The increased internal and external political disapprovals coupled with economic insecurity and decreased support of the regime compelled that "the Family Law was later revised to comply with the general principles of Islam" (Abdullahi, 2009 p: 17).

In short, the socialist government had given lip service to gender equality as it failed to include women in its high-ranking military offices and political positions. After two decades of massive abuse of power and clan favoritism that became unbearable in late 1990, Barre's government was removed as civil war erupted. The country fell into complete chaos due to clan divisions and the lack of a Somali faction able to reconcile all clans or establish a new government.

## Appendix B

### **Research questions:**

1. What is your name?
2. In which year were you born?
3. In which country were you born?
4. Did you live in another country before moving to Minneapolis/London?
5. How many years have you lived in Minneapolis/London?
6. Would you like to move back to Somalia in the future?
7. How often do you visit Somalia?
8. What language would you consider your first language?
9. What is your current employment status?
10. What is your education level?
11. Where did you go to school/college?
12. How do you feel living in Minneapolis/London?
13. How do you think is the reputation of Somalis in Minneapolis/London?
14. Where is home for you?

15. What was your pre-migration political experience? (For first generation respondents only)
16. Do you follow the politics of Somalia?
17. How well informed would you say that you are informed about the politics of Somalia?
18. Do you participate in any form of politics in Minneapolis/London?
19. What forms of political participation do you practice?
20. Have you ever contacted a politician; signed a petition; taken part in a public demonstration; donated money to a politician; contacted the media; attended a political meeting/forum
21. Do you vote?
22. When was the last time you voted?
23. Do you feel your vote counts?
24. How well informed would you say that you are informed about the politics of Minneapolis/London?
25. Have you ever been discriminated?
26. How do you find the politics of Minneapolis/London?
27. What motivates you to participate in politics?
28. Do experiences related to discrimination and stigmatizations impact your political participation?

29. In which way?
30. Have you been in the past part of an organization or group?
31. Are you currently a member of an organization or group?
32. Do you remember how you started joining in Somali non-Somali organization or group?
33. How many years are you/have you been involved in this organization?
34. Have you participated in any activity arranged these organizations?
35. Could please tell me why are you involved or not involved in any of these organizations or groups?
36. Do these organizations impacted your political participation?
37. Did someone in these organizations/group ask your or encourage you to participate in politics?
38. What are the most important issues that concern you at moment in Minneapolis/London?
39. How these concerns affect your political participation?
40. Would you continue in participating in politics?